CHRIST PRE-EMINENT

Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS

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Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians

By

W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

Author of Devotional Commentaries on The Book of Genesis and The Epistle to the Romans, The Apostle Peter, Methods of Bible Study, Grace and Power, The Holy Spirit of God, The Power of Peace, The Prayers of St. Paul, The Christian Life and How to Live It, Life Abiding and Abounding, The Acts of the Apostles, Here Am I, Mending Their Nets, Must Christians Sin? Some Tests of Old Testament Criticism, What About Evolution? Evolution and the Supernatural

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

EACH Epistle of St. Paul has its own special characteristics, and when they are all put together they sum up completely the teaching of the great Apostle's life. Dr. Beet, treating these Epistles in their generally accepted chronological order, from Thessalonians to Titus, says that they exhibit the springtime (1 and 2 Thessalonians), summer (Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans), autumn (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon), and winter (the Pastoral Epistles) of the great Apostle's year. Lightfoot tabulates the Epistles in this way: (a) The Second Missionary Journey (1 and 2 Thessalonians), The Epistles of the Tribunal, or Christ the Judge; (b) The Epistles of the Third Missionary Journey (1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans), The Epistles of the Cross, or Christ the Redeemer; (c) The Epistles of the first captivity (Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon), The Epistles of the Throne, or Christ the Word; (d) The Epistles of the Release and second captivity (1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy), The Epistles of the Congregation, or Church Organisation.

Ephesians and Colossians represent the highest, fullest, richest presentation of Christianity. Just as Romans tells us how to enter into fellowship with Christ through the Gospel, so Ephesians and Colossians tell us how to abide therein. First we come out of bondage and then we are brought into the banqueting-house.

I. The Place

Colosse was in Asia Minor, and was reached from the sea from Miletus up the rivers Meander and Lycus. There were three cities near one another: Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colosse. St. Paul does not seem to have visited Colosse, but Epaphras, one of his converts at Ephesus during the three years there (Acts 19:10-26), was the means of founding the Colossian Church, and was its Evangelist (Col. 1:4, 9; 4:12, 13). This Epistle was written during St. Paul's imprisonment in Rome (Acts 28:30), about A. D. 62 or 63.

II. The Purpose

Colossians was written because there was real danger of false teaching, a mixture of Judaism and Orientalism (2:16-18). This took the form, first, of an exclusive intellectualism, almost entirely connected with speculation, and, then, in practical life the tendency was either in the direction of asceticism or sensuality. As in Galatians and Romans the Apostle waged warfare against everything legalistic and materialistic which was placed as a stumbling-block to people who desired to know and accept the Gospel, so here he contends against everything that would minister to intellectual pride and separateness.

It is especially interesting to notice the relation of this Epistle to that of Ephesians, because the likeness is so marked. As one writer puts it: "Out of 95 verses in Colossians, 78 have a marked resemblance to Ephesians; while out of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 78 resemble Colossians." But the particular character of this resemblance is even more striking. The same topics are treated in both, but with a very significant difference of application. Dr. Sanday has thus stated this feature:—

"In the Ephesians the Church is the primary object,

and the thought passes upward to Christ as the Head of the Church. In the Colossians Christ is the primary object, and the thought passes downwards to the Church as the Body of Christ."

The more this contrast is studied the more remarkable it will appear. In Colossians the Apostle gives a careful and thorough statement of the person and work of Christ; while in Ephesians the main topic is our Lord's relation to the Church. In Colossians there is no such emphasis on the Church and its privileges, but only on the great realities concerning Christ. Nothing can be for a moment allowed to come between the soul and God. The same duties are emphasised in both Epistles, but with this different bearing. Our life, as stated in Colossians, is to be lived in relation to Christ, while many of the moral applications in Ephesians are related to the Church and to our duties to one another.

III. The Plan

Of the many attempts to analyse this Epistle only two seem to be worthy of attention. One of these appeared in *The Princeton Theological Review* for October, 1918, and is by Prof. E. C. Caldwell, of Richmond, Virginia. It forms part of the author's Stone Lectures at Princeton, and it is earnestly to be hoped that it will be issued in book form. Dr. Caldwell calls attention to the way in which so many writers seem to think that there is no organic structure in Colossians, while he, on the contrary, maintains that there is a real literary arrangement, and that every section, paragraph, and sentence has its proper place and function. This is how Professor Caldwell sets out the plan of the Epistle:—

1. *Introduction.* 1:1-14. This includes the salutation, the thanksgiving, and the opening prayer.

2. *Part 1.* 1:15-23. The pre-eminence of Christ over creation, providence, and redemption.

3. *Part 2.* 1:24–4:6. The practical effects of the pre-eminence of Christ.

(a) On Paul himself (1:24–2:7).

(b) On a false philosophy of the Christian life (2:8-23).

(c) On the true doctrine of the Christian life (3:1–4:6).

In this section there are five fruits of the Christian life, all proceeding from the union in Christ stated in 3:1-4. The first fruit is the death of the "old man" (3:5-9). The second is the putting on of the "new man" (3:10, 11). The third is the clothing of the new man with the garments of holiness (3:12-14). The fourth is the transformation of relationships (3:18–4:1). The fifth is a life of prayer and activity (4:2-6).

4. *Conclusion* (4:7-18).

This is only a bare outline of a most suggestive and valuable study which readers of the book, when it comes, will be only too glad to ponder and make their own.

The other analysis is found in Dr. Bullinger's interesting book, "The Church Epistles," and it is particularly interesting to compare this with the former one, and see the points of agreement as well as of difference.

1. Opening salutation (1:1, 2).

2. Mutual reports and messages by Epaphras (1:3-8).

3. St. Paul's solicitude for the Colossian saints and his prayer for them (1:9–2:7).

4. Doctrinal correction, with special reference to union with Christ in His death (2:8-23).

5. Doctrinal correction, with special reference to union with Christ in His resurrection (3:1–4:1).

6. St. Paul's solicitude for the Colossian saints and their prayers for him (4:2-6).

7. Mutual reports and messages by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9).

8. Closing salutation (4:10-18).

It will be noticed that in this outline there is an intro-version, Section 1 agreeing with Section 8, 2 with 7, 3 with 6, and 4 with 5.

IV. The Principle

There seems no doubt that the dominating thought of the Epistle is "Christ is all." Dr. Caldwell says that the well-known lines of Charles Wesley's hymn express the central idea:—

> Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
> More than all in Thee I find.

And he adds that whenever he reads Colossians he is reminded of the well-known passage in Browning:—

> I say, the acknowledgment of God in Christ, accepted
> by thy reason,
> Solves for thee all questions in the earth and out of it,
> And has so far advanced thee to be wise.

Three texts sum up this truth: "That in all things He might have the pre-eminence" (1:18); "In Whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9); "Christ is all and in all" (3:11). The failure of the Colossians was at this very point, "not holding fast the Head" (2:19). It is a well-known story that the celebrated artist, Dannecker, was asked by Napoleon to paint Venus for the Louvre, and declined. An enormous sum was then offered, and he still refused. The Emperor angrily demanded the reason why he declined, and the painter's answer was: "I have painted Christ, and I can never lower my brush to paint an inferior subject." It is also said of him that the first time he painted Christ, after years of hard work, he uncovered the canvas and asked his little daughter to look at it. When she clapped her hands and expressed surprise and admiration, the father asked:

"Who do you think it is?" "Oh," she replied, "it is a great man." The painter felt disappointed, and soon the picture was daubed beyond recall. He felt that he had failed because his little child did not recognise that it was meant for Christ. He went to work again, toiled as he prayed, and prayed as he toiled, and when he took the child in next time, there was no such expression of childish delight, but instead the little one stole quietly up to the painting as though it were real, and said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me." This is the secret of all true life, the preciousness and power of Christ.

This Epistle has a special and direct bearing on the various heresies of the present day, because it is concerned with the positive presentation of the antidote to every form of poison. As the late Bishop Moule truly and forcibly said: "No surer test according to the Holy Scriptures can be applied to anything claiming to be Christian teaching. Where does it put Jesus Christ? What does it make of Jesus Christ? Is He something in it or is He all?" Another writer points out that the Colossian heresy was no vulgar falsehood, because at the bottom of it there was an intense yearning for something which could not be satisfied in teaching the mediation of angels, and the consequent removal of God from all contact with matter. It claimed to honour God, and at the same time to show its own humility amid human and earthly evils as shrinking from any direct fellowship with God, while in its asceticism it ministered to human pride and self-righteousness. "It was human nature as essentially displayed everywhere, and in all ages; the circumstances and particular tenets ever changing, but the affectation of humility, and the proud, self-righteous spirit ever remaining the same. And thus it is that the Colossian heresy was the anticipation of the errors of today, and that the Apostle's confutation of it supplies the needed instruction

for ourselves." (*Oneness with Christ,* by Bishop W. R. Nicholson, pp. 19, 20.)

Thus our real safeguard is a personal experience of Christ, and as we consider our own circumstances today as faced with Unitarianism, Socialism, Spiritualism, Occultism, Russellism, Eddyism, the one test is "What think ye of Christ?" If only we are told where men and systems put the Divine Person and Atoning Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can at once decide whether this or that is Christian or not.

This emphasis on a personal conviction and consciousness of Christ has an equally Divine bearing on the serious lack of certitude which marks so much religion today. As a thoughtful writer has said: "Men are casting about them on either side for some standing ground. They have no strong convictions. . . . . Our present distress is ultimately due to theological unsettlement." Another writer has contrasted the remarkable certitude of the Old Testament prophet as he said with conviction, courage, and joy, "Here am I," while in the present day many are asking, in hopeless and vague uncertainty, "*Where* am I?" Those who know by personal experience the Lord Jesus Christ have no doubt as to where they stand, because they are able to say with the Apostle, "I know Whom I have believed."

> Whoso hath felt the Spirit of the Highest
> Cannot confound, nor doubt Him, nor deny.
> Yea, with one voice, O world, though thou deniest,
> Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.

N. B. Those who wish to give the closest possible attention to this truly important, valuable and precious part of God's Word will be glad to have references to the more important books available.

1. For grammatical commentaries, involving a knowl-

edge of Greek: Lightfoot, Ellicott and Williams (in the *Cambridge Greek Testament*). There is also a scholarly and suggestive treatment, *A Letter from Asia,* by Archdeacon Westcott.

2. For English commentaries, without involving a knowledge of Greek: Barry in Ellicott's *Commentary for English Readers,* and Rutherford's *St. Paul's Epistles to Colosse and Laodicea* (one of the most useful books, and far too little known); *The Cambridge Bible for Schools,* by Bishop Moule.

3. Devotional and Homiletic: Maclaren in the *Expositor's Bible* (a model exposition); Bishop Moule's *Colossian Studies,* and Bishop Nicholson's *Oneness with Christ,* edited by Dr. James M. Gray, of Chicago.

CHAPTER II

Personal Associations, 1:1-4

THE personal openings of St. Paul's Epistles almost invariably contain revelations of the writer's Christian character, and at the same time they suggest elements which should mark our life in and for Christ.

I. The Greeting (vs. 1, 2)

1. *The Source.* Paul describes himself as "an Apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God," and the term "Apostle" indicates here, as elsewhere, the thought of commission (Luke 6:13). St. Paul realises that he had been "sent" by Christ Jesus to do His work. The reference to "the will of God" is a further reminder of the Apostle's authority as derived from God and as independent of man. The phrase also suggests the truth of the title of Bushnell's sermon, "Every Man's Life a Plan of God." And yet the Apostle, while insisting upon the Divine source and authority of his work, nevertheless showed himself to be truly humble, for he was not only independent of man, but in a sense independent of himself, since his authority came from God and through God's will.

2. *The Fellowship.* The association of the Apostle with "Timothy our brother" is another indication of Paul's humility, because, although he had much to say that was deep and important, his naming of Timothy proves that he was ready to connect his young colleague with all this revelation of Christian truth. The word "brother" is of special interest, because, according to Bishop Westcott, (Epistles of St. John, p. 55), the term in the New Testament always signifies the Christian relationship, and is

never to be enlarged into the modern meaning of the brotherhood of humanity, true though that may be in itself.

3. *The Destination.* The Epistle is addressed to "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that are at Colosse." The word "saints" means "consecrated," and is a title applied to all Christians without exception. It is particularly important to realise that in the New Testament it never refers to spiritual condition, but only to spiritual position. Nowadays the term "saint" is often used cynically or in scorn as indicative of a pretence to special holiness, but the Bible view of "saint" is just one who belongs to God. It is not known why the Apostle addresses these later Epistles to Christians instead of to the Church as a whole. The change from "Church" to "saints" is marked by the Epistle to the Romans. These saints are described as "faithful," implying steadfastness and trustworthiness (Acts 16:15). This was their attitude to God, just as "brethren" suggests their relationship to those around them. Thus the term, "faithful brethren," describes their relation both to God and man. The further designation of them as "in Christ" and "at Colosse" is a beautiful reminder of what has often been pointed out as the two spheres of the Christian life, the heavenly and the earthly. Notwithstanding all the sin and danger involved in their living "at Colosse," they were safe and strong, and could feel satisfied, because they were "in Christ." Our Lord similarly describes the twofold environment of the Christian when He said, "In Me ye may have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Happy is the Christian who realises this twofold sphere and lives for Christ in his "Colosse."

4. *The Character.* The Apostle, as usual, except in the Pastoral Epistles, greets them with "grace to you and peace." Grace is the source, of which peace is the result:

the one is the cause, the other is the effect. The two words are also descriptive respectively of the Greek and Hebrew salutations. But beyond this, "grace" is the great Bible word expressive of God's undeserved and positive favour to the sinner, while "peace" is the outcome of that grace in the experience of the one who receives it. It is somewhat difficult to understand why this grace and peace should be limited here to "God our Father," because, as a rule, Christ is associated in this salutation. This is the more difficult to understand, because the Apostle has so much to say about the Divine nature of our Lord. The two words, "God" and "Father," are helpfully expressive of the two aspects of "power" and "love." The Hebrew term for God invariably means strength, while the thought of God as our "Father" necessarily indicates His loving interest in us as His children.

II. The Thanksgiving (vs. 3, 4)

1. *The Fact.* With the exception of the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul's letters always commence with thanksgiving. This seems to indicate a prominent feature of his religious life. He rejoiced to see every sign of the work of grace in the various communities of Christians, and had equal joy in acknowledging this in thanksgiving to God. It would be well for all Christians if the note of thanksgiving were made more definitely a part of our life.

2. *The Association.* With thanksgiving came prayer, and here again we notice the combination of prayer and thanksgiving in the Apostle's life. Like the two wings of the bird which are required to enable it to soar into the sky, St. Paul felt the need of both petition and acknowledgment. Both of these are expressions of faith, prayer being the faith that *asks,* and thanksgiving implying the faith that *takes.* The object of the thanksgiving and prayer is, as usual, "God the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ." The Apostle was deeply conscious of the reality of God, and this relation of the Father to Christ is of particular interest (Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3, 11:31; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3). God's Fatherhood in relation to Christ is one of the three aspects of the Divine Paternity found in the New Testament, and, of course, refers to the unique connection between God and our Lord. It is interesting to notice that in one passage we have the corresponding and complementary phrase, "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1:17).

3. *The Ground.* Three reasons are assigned for the thanksgiving and prayer of the Apostle. He had not been to Colosse or come in contact with the Christians there, but had heard of these things from his friend Epaphras, who had been the means of leading the Colossians to Christ (1:7).

(a) *Faith in Christ Jesus.* This is naturally the first element of the Christian life, because it brings the soul in contact with our Lord. Three Greek prepositions are found in connection with faith. In some verses Christ is the *object* (εἰς) of faith; in others He is the *foundation* (ἐπί) of faith; while yet again, as here, He is the *sphere* (ἐν) of faith.

(b) *Love Toward all the Saints.* This naturally sprang out of their faith in Christ, because "faith worketh by love" (Gal. 5:6), and those who are spiritually related to Christ are thereby of necessity related to those who belong to Him. The universality of the Apostle's reference to love is noteworthy, because it is said to have been directed toward "all the saints." This emphasis on the unity of the Christian community is to be specially noted, and the companion Epistle to the Ephesians similarly refers to this, as it speaks of the necessity of all the saints for the purpose of comprehending Christ's love (Eph. 3:18), and the equal necessity of intercessory prayer for

all God's people (Eph. 6:18). There is scarcely anything in which we can more definitely show our love than by this interest in "all the saints."

(c) *The Hope Laid up in the Heavens.* It is a little difficult to know the precise connection here, for the Apostle uses a different expression, "because of" the hope. Some think that the thought looks back to his thanksgiving and prayer, which have hope as well as faith and love for their object; others favour the idea that "faith" and "love" are based on the hope, and that this is the explanation of the change of expression. While the latter is more naturally grammatical, it is thought to be somewhat strange theologically, though in reality there does not seem any insuperable difficulty in thinking of the faith and love as springing from the absolute certainty of the great and glorious future which was theirs in Christ through the Gospel. But in either case, we have the three Christian graces of faith, love, and hope. Faith rests on the past, love works in the present, and hope looks towards the future. These three constitute the true Christian life, and not one should be omitted (1 Thess. 1:3, 9, 10). We are only too apt to emphasise faith and love and forget hope, but inasmuch as hope is invariably connected with the coming of the Lord, it is a vital part of our Christian life. Faith accepts, hope expects; faith appropriates, hope anticipates; faith receives, hope realises; faith is always and only concerned with the past and present, hope is always and only concerned with the future. This hope is said to be "laid up" for Christian people in the heavens, and the phrase is worthy of notice because of its use elsewhere. Thus, righteousness is said to be "laid up" for those who love Christ's appearing (2 Tim. 4:8), while it is also recorded that it is "laid up" for men once to die (Heb. 9:27). A solemn contrast is also seen in the parable of the pounds, where the

unfaithful servant "laid up" his Master's gift and did not use it (Luke 19:20).

As we review this section of the Epistle, we observe three elements of the Christian life which were prominent in the Apostle's experience, and should characterise ours.

1. *Consciousness of Relationship to God.* The Apostle had no doubt as to what he was and where he stood. As a servant of Christ he was fully assured of the will of God and of the grace that was continually coming from God. This "blessed assurance" is one of the essential secrets of true, buoyant, vigorous Christian living.

2. *Concern for the Christian Life of Others.* The Apostle not only exercised faith in Christ, but love towards Christ's followers, and this again is one of the fundamental realities of true Christianity. It is impossible for anyone to possess spiritual life without showing an interest in others, for the man who claims to love God without loving those who belong to God contradicts the very elements of the Christian faith (1 John 3:16; 4:7, 11, 20, 21; 5:2).

3. *Completeness of Christian Character.* In the threefold reference to faith, love, and hope, the Apostle shows the necessity of a "full-orbed" Christian life. In the picture of the Holy City we are told that the length, breadth, and height of it are equal (Rev. 21:16), and this, as Phillips Brooks has pointed out in one of his great sermons, suggests the necessity of a true proportion in the Christian life. Some people emphasise depth without breadth; others are concerned with breadth while failing in depth. The true believer will aim at being both deep and broad, lest his depth alone should tend to narrowness, and his breadth alone lead to shallowness. Every true character will possess the two elements of intensity and extensiveness, and faith, love, and hope in their proportion and balance will thus be at once the proof and guarantee of a life that will constantly glorify God.

CHAPTER III

The Apostolic Message, 1:5-8

ONE great thought is usually prominent with St. Paul and is never far away from his interests—the nature and extension of the Gospel. It comes out again and again quite unexpectedly, and here it arises naturally out of the salutation.

I. The Word Described

It is interesting to notice that the message is spoken of as "the word of the truth of the Gospel." Christianity stands for reality as the religion of truth which comes from above. It is also a "Gospel," a message of good news. This "good news" is thus at once real and genuine and, as such, is incapable of alteration (Gal. 2:5-14).

II. The Word Preached

Epaphras was the Evangelist at Colosse (1:7; 4:12; Philem. 23). He had proclaimed the good news to these people and then had conveyed to the Apostle Paul the tidings of what he had done.

III. The Word Heard

This Gospel had been heard and heeded, because the Colossian Christians had not only listened to it (v. 5), but had received it (vs. 7, 9). The preaching of the Gospel calls for attention by those to whom it is sent, and whenever it is thoughtfully and earnestly listened to, it will produce its effects on mind, heart, and life.

IV. The Word Received

This Gospel had not only been heard, but had actually

been assimilated (v. 6), and those to whom Epaphras proclaimed the truth welcomed what they had heard and made it part of their personal experience. They realised that it was "the grace of God in truth." Again, therefore, the idea of "truth" is made prominent, because the essence of good news is that which is true, while the value attaching to "grace" is that it must be real. Not only had the Gospel been assimilated in Colosse, but it had actually gone much further, so that the Apostle could speak of it having reached "all the world" (v. 6). This statement in view of the early date is very significant and shows the universality of the Gospel (Rom. 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:8) as the power of God unto salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16).

V. The Word Proved

The result of their learning from Epaphras was the reception and reproduction of the Gospel in their lives, and the description of what took place is particularly noteworthy as indicating what should always be the outcome of the hearing, learning, and reception of "the word of the truth of the Gospel." The inward effect was "fruit" (v. 6). This is the inevitable result of the Gospel as a Divine and living seed (Mark 4:28). This fruit was at once continuous and increasing, showing both inward and outward power (Eph. 2:21; 4:15). It is one of the essential features and necessary proofs of the Gospel that the results should be constant and progressive. Another point of importance is that this outcome marked the whole of their Christian life, "since the first day" they "heard and knew the grace of God in truth" (v. 6). It does not take long for the Gospel to work, for the moment it is received into the heart it begins to bear fruit. The use of the word "knew" is of special importance, because it is a mark of these Epistles of the captivity in Rome, indicat-

ing a full and mature knowledge (Eph. 1:17, 18; 4:13). It always includes a personal experience as well as an intellectual conception, and is part of that knowledge of God which is life eternal (John 17:3). The reality of this life at Colosse is further shown in the description of their "love in the Spirit." They had evidently received and were realising the grace of God in such a way as to reproduce it in a love which came from the Holy Spirit. It is worth while noticing in these verses a significant and suggestive implication of what is now known as the doctrine of the Trinity (vs. 6-8). It is in such ways that the Three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are most definitely and effectually shown to be Divine, because of their spiritual influence in the life of believers.

As these points are considered, they illustrate very clearly a well-known passage of the Apostle, that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth" (Rom. 1:16).

1. *The Gospel as God's Power.* This word "power," which in the original is "dynamic," shows what Christianity was intended to be in heart and life, and the reality of it is abundantly evident in the way in which these Colossian Christians experienced "the grace of God in truth." This was the "dynamic" in their lives.

2. *The Gospel as God's Power unto Salvation.* Salvation is one of the great words of the New Testament, covering past, present, and future, and the results of hearing the Gospel are clearly seen in this passage to prove the present and continuous salvation of these believers, as they allowed the grace of God to work in their lives.

3. *The Gospel as God's Power unto Salvation for All.* The universality of the Gospel is evident here, as elsewhere. It had come to others besides those in Colosse (v. 5, 6) and was bearing fruit "in all the world." There

is, perhaps, nothing more impressive than the way in which the Gospel adapts itself to the varied races, capacities, and circumstances of human life all over the world. This is one of the strongest evidences that it comes from God. Other religions are only partial and local and make no universal appeal. Christianity, because it comes from God, is equally suitable to all races of mankind.

4. *The Gospel as God's Power unto Salvation for All through Believing.* The emphasis placed here on the way in which these people in Colosse first heard, then learnt, then believed, and then came to know "the word of the truth of the Gospel" shows that the message of Christ is intended to be received by simple trust, and when it is thus accepted, it soon vindicates itself in various ways in heart and life.

5. *The Gospel as God's Power unto Salvation Is to Be Proclaimed Everywhere.* This, too, is implied and suggested all through this passage. When the Gospel is received, it is to be passed on, for it cannot be kept only in the heart. When Epaphras received it from St. Paul, he quickly communicated it to others as "a faithful minister of Christ," and then the Gospel bore fruit in the Colossians, whereby others in turn were made acquainted with it. This is the supreme proof of the reality of our life, the proclamation of the Gospel to others. Gratitude impels and obedience compels.

CHAPTER IV

An Apostle's Prayer, 1:9-12

THE prayers in Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians are of particular interest, because they express so fully the deeper experiences of the Apostle. On this account they are of importance in revealing some of the features of St. Paul's spiritual life. They afford believers an opportunity of testing and guiding their own lives. This is the first of the prayers in the present Epistle, and it deserves special attention from the standpoint of Christian experience.

I. The Reason of the Prayer (vs. 3, 4)

As St. Paul had not visited Colosse, the information about their growing faith and love came from Epaphras (v. 5, 7), and when the tidings arrived, the Apostle not only thanked God, as we have seen, but offered this prayer in his deep interest for the spiritual well-being of the Christians in Colosse. It has often been pointed out that interest in the spiritual life and progress of others is a real mark of Divine grace, for it prevents a believer from being selfish or self-centered.

II. The Substance of the Prayer

This is seen in the words, "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." The will of God is, of course, the revelation of God's character and purpose for mankind, and it is the vital secret of all Christian life. Just as in the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Thy will be done," so all through our life the will of God may be said to dominate everything. This Divine will is to be thoroughly known, and here, again,

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we have the characteristic word for "knowledge," meaning deep, full, mature, spiritual experience, which is the mark of the growing Christian (Phil. 1:9; Eph. 1:17; Philem. 6). The measure of this knowledge of God's will is suggested by the words "filled with," indicating a constant experience, and a permanent and practical knowledge of what is right and true. This knowledge is to show itself "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." Wisdom is a general term, involving what may be called the power of spiritual perception, while "understanding" is a definite application of wisdom to particular cases, "putting two and two together," and seeing the bearing of truth on life. All this emphasis on Christian perception, understanding, knowledge, wisdom, is of supreme importance as a safeguard against error of various kinds. The trouble with so many people is that they are superficial in their knowledge and shallow in their experience, and, as such, are a prey to various errors, by being "carried about with every wind of doctrine."

III. The Object of the Prayer

The knowledge is intended to lead to definite practical life, for the prayer to be filled with the knowledge of God's will is followed by the suggestion that "ye might walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing." Knowledge is to be expressed in practice. Christianity was often spoken of as "the way" (Acts 19:9, 23; 22:4), and "walking" is a word frequently found in Scripture, describing the outward and visible expression of our Christian life in movement, progress, and conduct. Walking worthily of the Lord is a wonderful thought, and may well be compared with other passages of similar meaning. Thus, we are to walk worthy of our Christian calling (Eph. 4:1); worthy of the Gospel (Phil. 1:27); worthy of the

saints (Rom. 16:2); and worthy of God (1 Thess. 2:12). The phrase "unto all pleasing" is particularly interesting. The late Bishop of Durham felicitously renders it "unto every anticipation of His will." This means that we are not only to do what we are told, but to anticipate God's commands by living in fellowship with Him. The word here rendered "pleasing" is not found elsewhere in the New Testament, but is used in Greek outside to mean a preference of the will of others before our own. The Apostle was strongly opposed to what he called "men-pleasing" (Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:6; Col. 3:22), as altogether incompatible with being a follower of the Lord. While, of course, he could be, and was, "all things to all men" (1 Cor. 9:22), and could urge the duty of pleasing "his neighbour for edification" (Rom. 15:2), yet everything in the way of "pleasing" must be subordinated to pleasing God (1 Thess. 4:1), since only in this way can we possibly do the right thing in making ourselves pleasing to men.

Then follow the details of this walk in four striking phrases marked by participles:

1. We are to be "fruitful in every good work." Our life is to be characterised by ripeness, as we do service for God.

2. Then we are to increase *by* the knowledge of God (rather than *"in"* the knowledge of God). Knowledge is to grow, and will grow, by accessions, and the more we know of God the more fruitful will be our life and the greater the increase of Christian graces. The context suggests that the path towards the knowledge of God is not that of mere speculation or even of devotional contemplation, but the way of definite, genuine, whole-hearted practice. We are to *do* in order that we may *know* still more.

3. Then comes the thought of strength with a view to "all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." Every

word calls for careful consideration, because the Apostle's thought seems to be almost incapable of being expressed in language. The strength which is to be ours is intended to lead to patience, long-suffering and joy, thereby showing that the inward vigour of character is intended to manifest itself in quiet, consistent endurance and humility. The element of joy will always prevent our patience from being cold and repelling, because long-suffering can easily be manifested in a hard, stern way which will bring no glory to God. We hear far too much of resignation and far too little of a delight in God's will. The three words, "patience and long-suffering with joyfulness" are very interesting in their combination. "Patience" means endurance rather than a mere passive acceptance of a certain position. It is the word used of Job (James 5:11), and, as we know, his attitude was not merely that of resignation, but of deliberate, determined, and persistent endurance in the face of trial. With this "patience" comes "long-suffering," which is to be understood as implying the temper of gentleness and loving-kindness (1 Cor. 13:4). With these two should come "joyfulness," and in many places this spirit is seen exhibited in the life of Christ and the teaching of the Apostles (Matt. 5:12; Heb. 12:2; 1 Pet. 4:13; Phil. 1:18, 19). And so as a commentary points out, these three words form a climax: "patience" struggles and endures; "long-suffering" endures without a struggle; "joyfulness" endures and glories in suffering.

4. The crowning grace is that of thankfulness, the heart full of gladness and gratitude for all that God is moment by moment to the soul. The Apostle has already expressed his own thanksgiving, and now urges the same welcome grace upon those to whom he writes as that which, in a way, gives force, tone, and character to the entire Christian life. Thanksgiving will always manifest itself in the word "thanksliving."

IV. The Nature of the Prayer

It is impossible to dwell upon the substance and purpose of the prayer without trying to discover some of the features of the Apostle's prayer-life. (*a*) There was an *earnestness* about his petitions, for he had prayed for the Christians in Colosse ever since he had heard of them from Epaphras. (*b*) For the same reason his prayer was *continuous.* He "did not cease to pray," but kept on asking again and again, since these Christians were felt to be in need of grace and graces from God. (*c*) There was also an *intensity* about these petitions, for they went down to the Apostle's heart in his desire to obtain for these young believers all possible blessing. (*d*) Nor was he alone in these prayers, which were offered *in union* and communion with others. Just as the Epistle associates Timothy with the message, so he was connected with St. Paul in these petitions. Individual prayer is mighty, but united prayer is mightier still. These are the four characteristics of the Apostle's prayers, and they reveal, more than anything else, what he was and how he lived.

There are many true and deep lessons for the Christian life in connection with St. Paul's prayers, and, in particular, they speak of three aspects of truth which are of supreme importance.

1. *The Value of Character.* The details of the Apostle's prayer show what he felt was the true Christian life. It consists of being rather than doing or of being with a view to doing. The various graces mentioned in these verses may all be summed up in the word "character," and it is what we are, not what we say, that gives the best testimony to others of the reality of our Christian life. This is very prominent here and elsewhere in the Epistles. "Character makes the man." This is the first thought, as we contemplate the Christian life depicted in

the Epistles. And then, as we think of the Apostle's prayer, we naturally add the complementary truth, "Christ makes the character."

2. *The Value of Experience.* The Apostle's prayer is marked by much reality, fulness, and depth of Christian life, and it is evident he feels the necessity and importance of this on behalf of the Christians for whom he prays. Such an experience is always based on a personal acquaintance with God, and this, in turn, can only come through the Word of God. Every emphasis on "knowledge" shows that St. Paul is concerned for spiritual experience as one of the chief marks of a growing Christian. It has often been pointed out that St. John seems to have the same conception of the vital importance of experience, for he refers to the Christian life under its three stages of "little children," "young men," and "fathers" (1 John 2:12-14). The "little children" possess the inestimable benefit of forgiveness and are in spiritual touch with their Father. The "young men" are vigorous and strong, having overcome Satan, because of the indwelling of God's Word. The "fathers" are those who "know," and this seems to be the culmination of everything. And yet knowledge and the Word of God are associated with the "little children" and "young men" as well, thereby showing the absolute necessity of a personal experience if our Christian life is to be what God intends it to be.

3. *The Value of Intercession.* It is clear from this and several other passages that St. Paul made much of prayer on behalf of others. Not only did he seek their prayers, but he prayed for them. A writer has helpfully suggested that it might have seemed that, as they were already Christians, the Apostle should have concentrated his entire interest in prayer for the unconverted, but it is evident that he realised the need of Christians to grow, to become strong, and to reach as far as possible

"the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Thus, as at every stage of the Christian life, "we need to be taught more and more," so we need to be evermore in prayer for each other. Bishop Moule quotes from an old book, *The Christian Ministry,* by Charles Bridges: "There can be little doubt but we shall find that our most successful hours in employment for our people were not those when we were speaking to them of God, but when we were speaking for them to God." To the same effect are some important words of E. M. Bounds in his valuable book, *Power Through Prayer:* "The Church is looking for better methods; God is looking for better men. What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organisations or more novel methods, but men whom the Holy Ghost can use—men of prayer, men mighty in prayer. The Holy Ghost does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer. Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to men for God who has not learned well how to talk to God for men."

CHAPTER V

God the Father, 1:12, 13

IT is surprising that so little mention is made of God the Father in the lives of many Christian people, while there is an almost constant reference to our Lord Jesus Christ. This feature has given rise to some severe criticism of Evangelicalism as favouring what has been called a "Jesus-religion." While it is not fair criticism, there is sufficient truth in it to make us give careful attention to the matter, and it cannot be doubted that many of our hymns, perhaps too many, are addressed to our Lord instead of to the Father, which helps in the same direction to concentrate attention on the Second Person of the Trinity to the frequent virtual forgetfulness of the First. The New Testament invariably sets before us God the Father as both the primary Source and the ultimate Goal of the believer's life, and the Apostle in these verses provides a valuable opportunity of seeing this for ourselves. Three truths are definitely associated with the Father as the ground of our thankfulness.

The title "Father" is particularly noteworthy because of its frequency on the lips of our Lord. The Old Testament has comparatively little to say about the Fatherhood of God, and even when it does say anything the association is almost entirely with Israel and the covenant. But in the New Testament the Divine Fatherhood appears with remarkable fulness, mainly because it was beyond all others the name used by our Lord to express His relationship to God. It has been computed that He spoke of the Father, and used this title some 150 times, and it is well known how singularly infrequent was His use of the term "God." This emphasis on God as His own

Father and as the Father of all believers (John 1:12; Gal. 3:26) is of vital importance in regard to things spiritual.

I. The Inheritance

When St. Paul speaks in this verse of "the inheritance," he seems to be giving a Christian interpretation to a well-known Old Testament word. From the thought of the earthly Canaan he leads up to the truth of the spiritual inheritance of believers (Deut. 32:9; Job 31:2; Psa. 47:4). This inheritance has been assigned to God's people, and is the outcome of their new birth (1 Pet. 1:3, 4). It is of special importance to remember that the words "heir" and "inheritance," with all their associated terms and ideas, are to be carefully distinguished from our modern use of the same words. Today the "heir" is one who has not yet come into his "inheritance," but has to wait until the death of the present possessor. In the Bible, however, the Christian's heritage is something present and actual, being enjoyed here and now. It is worth while to notice that the Christian life may be summed up in six words, which cover the whole from the beginning to end. It starts with Sonship; it proceeds to Discipleship; it calls for Stewardship; it is expressed in Worship; it rejoices in Fellowship; and it culminates in Heirship (Rom. 8:17). It is also vital to realise that the spiritual counterpart of Canaan is not heaven, but the life of spiritual privileges at the present time. It is unfortunate that so many hymns connect Canaan with heaven. The old words,

> Could we but stand where Moses stood
> And view the landscape o'er,
> Not Jordan's stream nor death's cold flood
> Could fright us from the shore,

are true in themselves, but they give a wrong impression of the New Testament teaching concerning Canaan. In the same way we sing about "Sweet Fields Beyond the Swelling Flood," but we often fail to enjoy the reality and blessedness of our present privileges. When Joshua entered Canaan there were enemies left to fight, and when we enter our spiritual Canaan there are still foes to face. This alone shows that the reference must be to the present life, for, of course, there will be no foes in heaven. It seems a pity, and often leads to spiritual loss, to project so many of our joys into the future, instead of realising them in the present. Children are taught to look forward to heaven as a place where they will be happy when they die, but it may be questioned whether hymns about heaven are spiritually helpful for children. Someone has said that it would be truer to sing

There is a happy land,
Not far away,

and also that a revised version of another hymn would be helpful:—

There's a Friend for little children
Beneath the bright, blue sky.

Be this as it may, there is no doubt that we suffer loss by not realising and rejoicing in our present inheritance of grace in the Canaan of the soul. Mr. Hopkins used to tell us at Keswick of a commentator who, when he had to write on the words, "Ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet. 1:8), said that, of course, these words must refer to heaven, when quite obviously the whole context refers to the present joy and exultation of the believer.

This inheritance is described by the Apostle as "the parcel of the lot" or "the part of the inheritance," thereby

suggesting the truth that each believer has some portion of the great inheritance which is specially his own. We share the inheritance with our fellow-believers, and while all are equally possessed of these privileges, yet there is at the same time a distinction through the consciousness that each one has his own part in this wonderful "lot" (Acts 8:21).

This inheritance is described as belonging to "the saints in the light." As already noticed, the word "saint" invariably describes our spiritual position, never our actual condition. A saint is one who belongs to Christ, and this inheritance is seen to be the possession of those who are themselves possessed by Christ. The reference to "light" is particularly significant as expressive of the true character of the Christian position (John 1:1–5; Eph. 5:8–14). Light in Scripture always includes the three elements of truth, holiness, and joy, and the sphere of our inheritance is in this threefold light of truth, purity, and gladness. There is much in the Bible about light, which calls for meditation. God is Light (1 John 1:5); Christ is the Light of the world (John 8:12); the Word of God is described as light (Psa. 119, 105); Christians have been called out of darkness into God's light (1 Pet. 2:9); and on this account are described as "the children of light" (1 Thess. 5:5). It is, therefore, not surprising that the future home of the soul is described as an abode of light and glory (Rev. 21:23–22:5).

But special attention should be paid to the work of the Father in this connection. He is said to have "made us meet." The word is literally "made competent," being found only in one passage elsewhere (2 Cor. 3:6). The Bishop of Durham renders it "qualified," and it contains the idea of sufficiency, meaning that the Father has called and qualified us with a spiritual equipment sufficient to possess and enjoy this spiritual heritage.

II. The Deliverance

The next part of the work of the Father on our behalf is described as our deliverance from the authority of darkness. This fresh reference to darkness is impressive as showing the contrast between it and our spiritual inheritance in the light. Darkness is always connected with the three features of error, impurity, and misery. Darkness means that which is untrue, unholy, and unhappy, and these three are characteristics and results of sin. "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19). The Christian is to avoid hating his brother, because that would be walking in darkness (1 John 2:11), and to walk in darkness is to do the very opposite of holding fellowship with God (1 John 1:6). To the same effect St. Paul speaks of "casting off works of darkness" (Rom. 13:12). Our Lord had already spoken with solemnity of "the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53), and when St. Paul here speaks of "the authority of darkness," he is apparently referring to that unrestrained and tyrannical influence which is brought to bear upon those who belong to Satan. All who are out of Christ are under this usurped authority or power, being led captive by the devil at his will (2 Tim. 2:26).

The work of the Father is to deliver, or, rather, "rescue" us from this authority. The word is quite striking, meaning "snatched," in the sense of the deliverance of a captive. God does this by bestowing upon us His own Divine life, and enabling us thereby to get free of the bondage of spiritual death. The word "rescued" is in a tense which indicates actual deliverance, pointing to a time in the past, when this "rescue" was completely and finally brought about. It shows the interest and love of our Heavenly Father that He should do this for us in Christ by the gift of His Divine grace.

III. The Transference

It is not sufficient for God to have delivered us from the kingdom of darkness; there is a positive side as well, for He has at the same time translated us into an entirely new kingdom. This is called the kingdom of His Son, and we have here one of the passages which remind us that the kingdom of Christ is already in existence as a spiritual reality. In the next age this kingdom will be visibly manifested, but for the present it is internal, not external. It consists of those who have experienced spiritual life, and into this fellowship the Father puts every true believer who has received Christ by faith. This is the distinction between the visible Church of professed followers and the spiritual kingdom of those whose actual experience is "righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost" (Rom. 14:17).

The kingdom is described as that of the Son of the Father's love, the kingdom of our Lord, and of no one less than Divine. Love is, as we know, the essence of God's character (1 John 4:16), and since the Son is of the same nature as the Father, it follows that His kingdom is one of love. The contrast is evident between tyranny, bondage, cruelty, and love, freedom, privilege, and joy.

The word "translated" is of particular interest. It refers to a definite and complete change. It is found only five times, but always in this sense (Luke 16:4; Acts 13:22; 19:26; 1 Cor. 13:2). The corresponding passage in Ephesians (1:6) sheds light on this Divine act whereby God freely bestows grace on us in Him Who is His beloved Son.

From all this work of the Father two great truths emerge.

1. *These are Facts.* The verb in each case indicates something actually accomplished, something already done,

something that is absolute, and not merely contingent. It shows the value and importance of Divine grace in this emphasis on the Father's act. Our inheritance, our deliverance, and our transference are not matters involving our own effort or merit, but blessings which we simply receive, because of what has been accomplished by the Father. Merit is ruled out of everything from first to last in connection with Christianity and all is of grace. This emphasis on actual facts provides an inspiring foundation for our life. God has already accomplished these things, and it is for us to receive and enjoy them.

2. *These Facts are thus to be Factors in Our Life.* Because of what God has done we are to respond and live to His glory. The true life is fourfold: (*a*) we are to trust; (*b*) we are to be thankful; (*c*) we are to obey; (*d*) we are to bear testimony. And thus the facts become forces in our experience which rejoice the heart of God, give blessed assurance to our own souls, and glorify Him before others.

CHAPTER VI

The Divine Son, 1:14-17

AT length the theme of the Epistle is reached. Prayer and thanksgiving lead to an expression of faith in Christ. The entire passage (vs. 14-20) constitutes one of the most important Christological statements in the New Testament. "As a Christological statement it has scarcely an equal, certainly no superior" (Nicholson). With this may be compared other passages expressive of the Person and Work of Christ: Col. 2:9-15; Eph. 1:20-23; Phil. 2:6-11; Heb. 1:2-14; Rom. 9:5; Gal. 2:20; 1 Cor. 1:23, 24, 30. We shall see that in these verses various aspects of Christ's relationship are taught.

I. Christ's Relation to Grace (v. 14)

From the thought of the Father comes the natural reference to "the Son of His love," and then follows the obvious statement that "in Him we have redemption, even the forgiveness of sins." Redemption is one of the six words found in the New Testament to express the work of Christ: Sacrifice (Eph. 5:2); Offering (Heb. 10:10); Propitiation (1 John 2:2); Ransom (1 Tim. 2:6); Redemption (Heb. 9:12); and Reconciliation (Rom. 5:11). The special thought of redemption is deliverance from slavery by means of payment (Rom. 3:24), just as in verse 13 we see the corresponding thought of a victor and a rescue. The word rendered "redemption" is significant for its emphasis on the completeness of the work. The verb "to redeem" occurs three times in the New Testament (Luke 24:21; Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18), and in each case the thought is of deliverance wrought through the death of Christ. But nowhere are we told to whom

the payment was made, thereby avoiding the old and persistent error (which, however, as Dimock in his *Death of Christ* acutely points out, contained the germ of a real truth) of the devil to whom the payment was made. Scripture is content with emphasising the actual payment of what is valuable in the sight of God, that which can be called "the precious blood of Christ" (1 Pet. 1:19).

The specific aspect of redemption mentioned here is "the forgiveness of sins," and although the word "forgiveness" is one of the most familiar, it may be questioned whether many who use it realise the remarkable force and fulness of its meaning. "Forgiveness" is never defined in Scripture. The word itself means "removal," or "sending away," and this necessarily includes the remission of the penalty, the removal of the condemnation, and also the actual sending away both of sin (the root) and sins (the fruit). Never once do we read of the forgiveness of guilt or the forgiveness of condemnation, but only of the forgiveness of sin and sins, and the word must, therefore, mean something equivalent to the fulness of redeeming love and grace, covering past, present, and future, and embracing position and condition, standing and state, character and conduct. Nor can it mean only and merely the negative aspect of release, but must involve also the positive element of restoration, including saving, cleansing, justifying, purifying, sanctifying, illuminating, welcoming, blessing, and glorifying. A careful study of the usage of the word in the New Testament will prove this, however novel and surprising it may seem. Of course, we are accustomed to distinguish between forgiveness and justification, but there is a sense in which forgiveness may be said to include everything from the beginning to the end of Christian experience, because of the clear reference in Scripture to the "sending away" of sin and sins.

II. Christ's Relation to God (v. 15)

The basis of redemption is here seen in the relation of Christ to God. There could be no forgiveness of sins unless Christ were both God and man, for only a Divine act could "send away" our evil doing. Christ is described as "the image of the invisible God," and the word "image" seems to include the two ideas of representation and manifestation (2 Cor. 4:4; Heb. 1:3). In similar language, St. John speaks of Christ as "the Word" (John 1:1), meaning thereby the thought and expression of God, and for this reason our Lord could say, "No one hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). To the same effect are some other words, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). It has often been pointed out by writers on this Epistle how in these words the Apostle destroys all those erroneous teachings which were already beginning to have influence in Colosse. Instead of the various emanations from the Godhead which were considered to be links of intercourse between God and the world, the Apostle declares this vital and true doctrine of Christ as the One in whom God was manifested in human life. Some years ago a ministers' meeting was held, when a paper was read drawing the conclusion that Jesus Christ was a little more than man and a little less than God, the old error of the fourth century against which the Nicene Creed was drawn up. A friend of mine who was called upon to open the discussion said that this view would not do for him, because he was a sinner, and needed a Saviour, and that Saviour must be God as well as man. In words that deserve to be quoted again and again, Bishop Moule has said: "A Saviour not quite God is a bridge broken at the farther end."

III. Christ's Relation to Nature (vs. 16, 17)

Christ's connection with earth is next mentioned, and He is described as "the first begotten of all creation." The context makes it perfectly clear that this reference to Him is to One who is separate from and above creation, and not simply a created Being. It indicates His unique supremacy over creation, just as in verse 18, as we shall see, the same word is used of His relation to the Church. There are also three prepositions which further show the relation of Christ to creation: "*In* Him all things were created," and also "all things have been created *through* Him and *for* Him." Thus He is seen to be at once the sphere, the agent, and the purpose of creation. This creation is also stated to include all things in heaven and on earth, both visible and invisible, "whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or authorities." Even more than this, Providence is associated with Him, for the very same Being ("He Himself") is said to be before all things, and all things in Him find their coherence and continuity (v. 17). Nothing, therefore, could be clearer than these statements, expressive of the priority, sovereignty, and continuity of Christ in relation to nature. It will be seen that in these terms the Apostle is not referring at all to the Incarnation, but to the priority of Christ to creation, His essential relation to God and to the universe.

In this wonderful passage, in which the Apostle seems almost incapable of expressing fully the Divine thought in human language, we find some of the deep things of life, and we may consider the passage as teaching a threefold philosophy which Christians will do well to heed.

1. *The Philosophy of Religion.* This is seen in Christ's relation to God. A modern book tells of a man who had been brought up without religious teaching and of his

beginning to read the Bible. He said he was always coming on bits of the New Testament in books, and he tried to believe that the appeal of the New Testament lay in its style. "But then I took my courage in both hands and read the New Testament right through and saw there was no contact with God except in Christ." This is the fundamental and vital problem of today and of all other days, the essential Deity of Jesus Christ. Nothing less than this will suffice, and nothing can be called Christianity which does not start here in the absolute oneness of Christ with the Father as the "image of the invisible God." This is no mere abstract theological principle, but a truly vital necessity which touches ordinary life at every point. People sometimes are apt to think lightly of the words in the Nicene Creed: "Being of one substance with the Father," but it must never be forgotten that these words commended themselves to the whole Christian Church after the Council of Nicaea had dispersed, because they represented the vital truth of Christ's oneness with the Father as the sole basis of human redemption.

2. *The Philosophy of the Universe.* This is seen in the fact that Christ has the same relation to the natural world as He has to the spiritual world. Bishop Lightfoot, in an ever-memorable passage, calls attention to the great loss which we suffer by neglecting this wonderful truth of Christ's relation to nature. He very pointedly remarks that "the sympathy of theologians with the revelations of science and the developments of history" would be much more hearty "if they habitually connected them with the operations of the same Divine Word who is the Centre of all their religious aspirations." He also remarks that by the neglect of this "our theological conceptions suffer in breadth and fulness," while, on the other hand, "the recognition of this idea, with all the consequences

which flow from it," would more than any other way make possible that "harmony of knowledge and faith of revelations and research" which we all feel to be essential to complete life and strong influence (Lightfoot, *Colossians,* pp. 114, 115). Lightfoot's successor, the late Bishop of Durham, similarly points out how this thought of Christ as the "Cause, Head, and Goal of the created Universe" binds both worlds into one, and "this is a precious gain when our hearts fail us on the border-line between the two." Not only so, it makes nature so much more real and precious, because "it connects the remotest æon of the past with Him; it connects the remotest star with Him; it bids us, when we feel as if lost in the enormity of space and time, fall back upon the Centre of both, our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us." This and much more should be pondered by every earnest thinker who rejoices to realise that Christ is not only the Saviour of the soul, but "the ultimate law" of the universe (Moule, *Colossian Studies,* pp. 80-82).

3. *The Philosophy of Individual Life.* This is seen in the fact of the power of redemption (v. 14), and it is of special importance to realise that this redemption is in union with Christ and is also a present possession. Notice the forces of the two phrases: "in Him" and "we have." When this unspeakable blessing of redemption is seen to be ours as a blessed reality here and now, because of our union with Christ, we have learned the secret of true living and can rejoice with "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

CHAPTER VII

The Divine Redeemer, 1:18-20

THE theme of the epistle, the Divine Person of Christ, is so full and varied that it extends to several verses, and Christ's relation to creation (v. 15-17) is now to be paralleled by His relation to the spiritual world.

I. His Relation to the Church (v. 18)

The familiar word "Church" deserves careful study both here and in the companion Epistle to the Ephesians, because the reference is to a spiritual organism, not an ecclesiastical organisation. The word "Church," representing the Greek "Ecclesia," was originally applied to a gathering of Greek citizens who were summoned from their homes and private capacities to some public assembly where the people met together. In the Greek version of the Old Testament it is the translation of a Hebrew word referring to the gathering of the people of Israel. It is also used in Acts 19:41 to describe the meeting of the people of Ephesus. In the Christian sense it always indicates a meeting of Christian people, sometimes in a city or other place (Acts 8:1), but here and in Ephesians referring to the entire number of believers. This thought of the Church Universal as consisting of those who are spiritually united to Christ and form His Body is, as the late Bishop of Durham points out, the primary idea of the Church, and all other meanings are to be regarded as strictly secondary to it. It is probable that between the first mention of the word "Church" in Matt. 16:18, and the use of the term in Ephesians and Colossians there is no other reference to the Church

as a whole, but only to particular parts of it in their earthly manifestations. This widest, fullest, and, of course, truest sense of the term is well defined in some familiar words: "the blessed company of all faithful people."

It is also particularly interesting to notice the difference of treatment, even of this doctrine of the Church in Colossians, when compared with the teaching of Ephesians. In Colossians more emphasis is placed upon the Head, Christ Jesus, while in Ephesians the stress is laid on the unity of the Body. In both Epistles Christ is, of course, the Head, but it is singularly suggestive to observe the difference in the appeal made in both Epistles in regard to the same practical duties. Thus, for instance, in Colossians men are to avoid untruthfulness because of their relation to Christ (3:9), while in Ephesians the same duty is inculcated from the standpoint of other Christians (4:25). This is only one of a number of comparisons in which this aspect of truth is seen.

The thought of Christ as the Head of the Church implies the three great principles of life, unity and sovereignty. He is at once the Source of our spiritual life, the Guarantee of all spiritual unity, and the supreme Authority. He is the One who because He bestows life, controls all Christians, who are therefore expected to render Him love and loyalty. The more this thought of our union with Christ as the Head is realised, the truer will be the expression of our life in fellowship and obedience.

Then Christ is described as "the beginning," and the word is naturally reminiscent of the Greek term in verse 16 rendered "principalities." It teaches that Christ is the Beginning of everything in connection with the Church, His Body. Then follows a further statement, "the firstborn from the dead," and again the thought looks back

to verse 15, where He is spoken of as the first-born of every creature. The thought here, however, is associated with the resurrection, and indicates priority in regard to His own resurrection, and, because of this, the Source of our resurrection as well. By the resurrection He was "designated Son of God with power" (Rom. 1:4), for although Son of God already by reason of His eternal relationship with the Father, He became by His resurrection the Source of spiritual power to all who receive Him (Rom. 1:16; Eph. 1:19; 2:5).

All this spiritual relation and position is intended for one purpose: "that in all things He might have the pre-eminence." He was already pre-eminent in creation (v. 15), and now He is shown to be similarly supreme in the realm of grace (Phil. 2:9-11). While this thought is, of course, intended to apply to the whole Church (Eph. 1:10), it is impossible to avoid noticing the sad and solemn contrast with the only other place where the word "pre-eminence" is to be found (3 John v. 9). Those who love to have the pre-eminence cannot possibly recognise the pre-eminence of Christ.

II. His Relation to Redemption (vs. 19, 20)

The basis of what has been said is now shown to be due to the Deity of Christ, for only thus could there be anything like His position in the universe of nature and grace. And so we read that "it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness permanently dwell." The Father's pleasure concerning Christ is noteworthy here and elsewhere (Matt. 3:17), and shows at once the loving interest of the Father in the redemptive work of His Son, and at the same time the vital necessity of that redemption being accomplished by none other than a Divine Being. The word "fulness" expresses what has been called "all the plenitude of Deity," and it includes

"whatever is contained in the Divine nature in all its depths of eternal existence, righteousness, wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, truth, love." The term is found in this and the companion Epistle, and it is particularly interesting to notice the association of the word and thought with each Person of the Trinity (Eph. 3:19; 4:13; 5:18). It is also found elsewhere in this Epistle, indicating, as here, the entire fulness or completeness of the Godhead (2:9). Of the eleven occasions in which this word "fulness" is found in St. Paul's Epistles no fewer than six are in Ephesians and Colossians, and there is no doubt that with the use of a word implying permanent abode, Christ's Godhead is regarded as altogether apart from time and other limitations. "Any limitation of the meaning of pleroma (fulness) which would make the indwelling of the fulness of the Godhead in Christ a matter either of the future or of the past only is inconsistent with what is said of the indwelling of the pleroma in Him in ch. 1:19; 2:9. The reference in both passages is to the timeless and eternal communication of the Godhead from the Father to the Son" (Rutherford, p. 56).

This permanent fulness, betokening Deity, is intended for the purpose of reconciliation: "To reconcile all things unto Himself." St. Paul teaches similarly elsewhere that God is reconciling the universe to Himself through the Person and Work of Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). In Ephesians it is interesting to notice the illustration of the emphasis placed on the unity of the Church in the fact that this reconciliation is connected with the Jews and Gentiles, both being made into one body for the permanent habitation of God (2:14-22). When it is said that Christ reconciles "all things," it seems to mean that there will be no discord, but it has often been pointed out that the phrase "things under the earth" (Phil. 2:10) is significantly omitted here. While there will, of course,

be submission to Christ, either willing or unwilling, in order that He may be acknowledged by all as Lord (Phil. 2:11), yet here, where spiritual reconciliation is mentioned, there is a limitation to "things in earth" and "things in heaven." The description of reconciliation as affecting all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, is perhaps a hint of what is found elsewhere, that somehow or other creation has been affected by human sin (Rom. 8:19-22). "As there seems to be a physical unity in the universe, if we may believe the guesses of science, so, says Holy Scripture, there is a moral and spiritual unity also in Jesus Christ."

The method of this reconciliation is "the blood of His Cross," by which God has "made peace" in Christ. It is particularly noteworthy that the One who makes the peace is God the Father. This is another reminder that the Atoning Sacrifice was not due to the love of the Son only, but also to the love of the Father. "God so loved the world, that He gave" (John 3:16); "Christ loved us and gave Himself" (Eph. 5:2).

As the entire passage clearly teaches what God thinks of Christ, it becomes a necessary and important inquiry to ask what *we* think of Christ. If He is all this to God, it follows that He ought to be everything to us, and the whole passage may be summed up by saying that Christ should be to us and should have from us these four realities:—(1) *Life.* He is at once the Source and Support of it. And our life should belong to Him. (2) *Love.* This should be both a proof to others and a power for helping them. (3) *Lordship.* As He is first in the universe and in the Church, He ought to be "pre-eminent" in our individual experience. (4) *Loyalty.* This naturally and necessarily follows from all that has preceded. Loyalty comes from a French word associated with "law," and has been well defined as "legality with love."

CHAPTER VIII

The Great Redemption, 1:21,23

IT is natural that the great subject of Christology should be at once applied to Redemption, and in these verses we see some of the fundamental elements of that Gospel of Christ which arises out of the consideration of His Divine Person as discussed in the earlier verses.

I. Alienation (v. 21)

It is interesting to notice the way in which this verse commences: "And you," just as in the parallel passage (Eph. 2:1). It would seem as though in both cases the Apostle, having dealt with Christ, follows this by calling attention to the manner in which Christ's work is intended for those to whom he writes. The statement of their past life is very impressive in its solemnity. "Having become permanently estranged" is the literal rendering, showing not merely the former state from which they had fallen, but the present fact of their alienation. This does not necessarily mean open and gross sin, but that state of heart which comes from a deliberate opposition to God. We notice, first, the guilt of it, incurring condemnation, and then what may be rightly called the folly of it, because sin means leaving light for darkness, harmony for discord, dignity for humiliation, purity for defilement, and life for death.

This estrangement is further described in the phrase: "Enemies in your mind by wicked works." Alienation involves actual hostility to God, because the assertion of self must of necessity imply rebellion against Him. This enmity arises first in the mind by the thoughts and feelings being affected, and then it expresses itself in "wicked

works," acts of hostility, because the inner life is morally bad. This picture of depravity is at once true and sad: true to what sin has done for human life; sad because it means the loss of everything that tends to make life blessed, strong, and satisfying (Eph. 2:12; 4:18; Rom. 8:7).

II. Reconciliation (v. 21)

Then comes the blessed and glorious contrast between the past and the present. They were at one time alienated, "but now" has come reconciliation. He who has accomplished this reconciliation is none other than God Himself, and thereby He has shown His condescension by the offended One actually seeking reconciliation. This is the meaning of another passage in which the Apostle speaks of God in Christ reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:18). But this reconciliation is also a proof of God's righteousness, for while it does not affect the Divine heart (John 3:16), it of necessity involves and affects the Divine government. There could be no reconciliation unless it were accomplished on the basis of the Divine character of righteousness. It is impossible for God to be indifferent to sin, even though he loves the sinner.

Then the passage shows how this reconciliation has been brought about: "In the body of His flesh through death." In these words is a brief statement of the Incarnation, "The body of His flesh," and the Atonement, "through death." Christ came in order to die, and when it is said, "Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15), we see both the fact of Bethlehem and the fact of Calvary. Christ died for the ungodly, the just for the unjust, and sinful men are reconciled to God by the death of His Son (Isa. 53:6).

III. Expectation (v. 22)

The purpose of this redeeming work of Christ is now stated. The word "present" is particularly interesting for its three different applications, each suggesting a helpful truth. Sometimes a sacrifice is presented to God (Rom. 12:1). Or it may be a bride presented to her husband (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27), Then, too, a subject is presented at court (2 Cor. 4:14). Whatever be the precise meaning here, it is a beautiful thought that Christ, having redeemed us by His death, is to "present us before the throne of His glory with exceeding joy" (Jude v. 24). The three words indicative of the condition of the believer as thus presented are also noteworthy: "holy," "unblamable," "unreprovable," in His sight. There is to be entire consecration ("holy"); the absence of all censure ("unblamable"), and the absence of every accusation ("unreprovable"). This threefold description may perhaps be regarded as inward, outward, and upward, or internal, external, and eternal (Rom. 8:33; Heb. 9:14). Nothing less than this is to be the crown and culmination of our Lord's redemption.

IV. Continuation (v. 23)

As the past and the future have been considered, so now comes the thought of "the little while between." The believer who has been redeemed and who is to be presented is, meanwhile, to continue in the faith. Not that there is any doubt of his being in the faith, indicated by the word "if," but rather that his present continuance is a proof he is in the faith. "Since ye abide." This position is one of (*a*) permanent foundation and (*b*) steadfastness with (*c*) the absence of any continuing movement which tends to shake him from "the hope originated by the Gospel." Those who have accepted the redemption find

themselves firmly fixed and grounded in Christ Jesus and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (1 Cor. 15:58; Eph. 3:17).

V. Evangelisation (v. 23)

At this point the Apostle passes from the Christians of Colosse to himself as a preacher of the Gospel, and there are three elements of that Gospel which call for attention: (*a*) it was heard; (*b*) it was preached in all the world; and (*c*) it was a Gospel of which Paul was a minister. It is interesting to notice that in verse 7 we have a minister of Christ; here a minister of the Gospel, and in verse 25 a minister of the Church.

Thus we see here the whole Gospel, including sin, atonement, acceptance, holiness, salvation, and every part of it proclaimed all over the world by those who have received it. It is indeed a Gospel, "good news," and is intended for the hardest hearts, and for the most varied lives. As we consider its elements of power and blessedness, we see our duty is (1) to believe it, (2) to receive it, (3) to live it, (4) to enjoy it, and (5) to spread it.

CHAPTER IX

The Christian Minister, 1:24, 25

FROM the fact of the universality of the Gospel (v. 25) the Apostle proceeds to state some of his personal experiences. Hitherto he has been concerned with our Lord's relation to the universe, to the Church, and to the Christians in Colosse. Now he refers to himself and his own work, first, in relation to the whole Church (vs. 24-29), and then, especially, to the Church of Colosse (2:1-5). The thought of the Gospel (v. 23) naturally leads him to think of his own opportunity as a preacher of it, and he is evidently glad of the opportunity of glorying in his office. One characteristic, in particular, of his ministry is here mentioned, the element of joy, and in so writing he indicates what should be one of the features of our life and work for Christ.

I. The Character of His Ministry

He rejoices. This is the predominant fact, and the emphasis on himself, *"I* rejoice," seems to indicate his experience of joy, even though he was personally unworthy of this great office. One of the finest books written in modern days is entitled *The Joy of the Ministry,* by the late Bishop Wynne, and the very title suggests what should be the dominant feature of our service for Christ. There is also an emphasis on "now," and Lightfoot suggests that the force of it is, "when I see all the glory of bearing a part in this magnificent work." Or it may be that he was ready to rejoice even though in chains in Rome. Nothing should be allowed to stop his satisfaction, for, even though he is in the furnace, he will continue his joy. It is easy to be joyful when all things

are bright, but it is very different when, as with the Apostle, a sudden check had come to his active career and he was compelled to wait in prison for the day of trial and release.

II. The Cause of the Joy

By a remarkable paradox he speaks of joy in connection with his sufferings. They were a present and continuous fact in his experience; indeed, they were the sphere in which he may have been said to live. And yet, although these sufferings were still existing, he was ready and willing to rejoice. This is only one instance and illustration of the Apostle's joy, as he endured all things for Christ in his ministry (Acts 20:23, 24; Rom. 5:3; Phil. 2:17; Heb. 12:2).

This suffering was for the sake of others, on their behalf, for their advantage (2 Cor. 1:4, 5), and he speaks of supplementing a deficiency, as though something had been left over for him to endure. What this means will best be understood when we see that his personal sufferings were regarded as identical with those of Christ. The phrase, "the afflictions of Christ," is unique, and can only mean the afflictions which He Himself endured—His own afflictions. The Apostle supplied what was lacking in these. But to what afflictions of Christ can he refer? Certainly not to His expiatory sufferings, which were perfect and complete (v. 20), but to those individual afflictions in which He lived during His earthly life, and in fellowship with which the Apostle and all Christians are to live today. So that whilst, from the standpoint of sacrifice, there is, of course, nothing to add to the sufferings of Christ, yet from the standpoint of personal life and sympathy there is very much in which we can be identified with Him.

This suffering is intended for the whole Church

It is not only for individuals, but for the entire Body, and it is particularly interesting to notice the contrast between Paul's literal "flesh" and Christ's spiritual "Body," the Church. It is a beautiful and inspiring thought that each Christian can and should endure afflictions on behalf of the entire body of Christians. This is the real meaning of suffering, namely, the education, training, and disciplining of the soul (Heb. 5:8). While we cannot share Christ's sufferings which wrought salvation, we are able to share in His sympathy and personal afflictions. There is no possibility of merit on the part of any Christian or on the part of the entire Church, because our Lord's sufferings were sufficient, and more than sufficient, to atone for the sins of the whole world. But for the establishment of the Church there was still suffering to be endured after the Atonement had been made, and wherever the Apostles went they suffered as they preached, and preached as they suffered. In these afflictions we can share, and this is the solemn, inspiring, and beautiful truth the Apostle emphasises here. We must, therefore, not be afraid to face discipline if called upon to suffer, for thereby we shall be permitted to set forward the progress of the Church and the accomplishment of God's purpose.

III. The Circumstances of the Ministry

The Apostle calls himself a minister of the Church (v. 25), just as he had spoken of himself as the minister of the Gospel (v. 23). He also describes himself elsewhere as the minister of Christ (2 Cor. 11:23) and a minister of God (2 Cor. 6:4). These various aspects of service show how we can work and accomplish God's will.

This ministry is described as "according to the dispensation of God." The word "dispensation" seems to suggest the entrustment of a great responsibility, like the management of an estate.

The work is described as intended "to fulfil the word of God," that is, to bring to completion the message of God's grace (Rom. 15:9). The Apostle was not content with anything perfunctory; he put his whole soul into everything he did, and thus "fulfilled" or "filled full" the Divine Gospel entrusted to him.

As we contemplate these verses and ponder their meaning afresh with reference to Christian life and work, we cannot help noticing the features implied all through, which are as applicable to us today as to the Apostle. These may be summed up in five words, each of which carries its own meaning and message to those who belong to the Lord. (1) *Sonship.* This is the basis and presupposition of all true work. (2) *Service.* We are called upon to witness, to war, and to work in connection with the Gospel of God. (3) *Stewardship.* This implies responsible work and no ordinary service. As we deepen in experience of Christ He entrusts to us still more important tasks, and the true ministers are honoured by being called "stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4:1). (4) *Suffering.* Our task of witnessing to Christ will often involve opposition, and even hostility, and in all ages God's servants have had to "endure hardship." This is a glory if only we regard our suffering as the Apostle thought of his, as helping forward the cause of Christ and as glorifying God. (5) *Satisfaction.* In all life and work for God there wells up in the heart a spring of joy that God should have deigned to receive us and then to use us in His vineyard. There is nothing on earth to compare with the essential and perennial joy that comes from faithful effort for our God and Saviour.

CHAPTER X

The Christian Ministry, 1:26-29

THE Apostle's reference to the ministry (v. 29) naturally leads to a fuller explanation of "the Word of God" which he proclaimed. Whenever a new ambassador comes from a foreign court he has to present his letters of introduction, by which he is proved to be the authorised representative of his country. These letters are most naturally called "credentials." St. Paul here may be said to present his "credentials" as "an ambassador for Christ" (2 Cor. 5:20), and the features of his ministry are particularly worthy of careful consideration, because of their application to all who proclaim the Gospel of Christ.

I. The Character of the Ministry

He calls the Divine Word "the riches of the glory of this mystery," and each term needs thorough attention. In speaking of "riches," he naturally thinks of the abundance whereby its possessors are made rich. These Epistles of the captivity are particularly noteworthy for their reference to the wealth of the Gospel (Eph. 1:7, 18; 2:7; 3:8, 16; Col. 2:2). The word "glory" is also found frequently to describe the magnificence and splendour of the message. But the word "mystery" is specially significant. It is found 21 times in the New Testament, and invariably means something that was once hidden, but is now revealed. Here the Apostle is writing of what apparently had always been hidden, and only revealed a little time before, something, therefore, which, until that revelation, had not formed a part of the Divine message which he had to make known. This seems to

have been the special feature of the stewardship committed to him (v. 25; Eph. 3:2, 9). What, then, does he mean by the "mystery" which he defines as "Christ in you the hope of glory"? At first sight it would seem as though he only meant that those who belonged to Christ are saved by Him, but when the phrase "hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now made manifest" is considered, there must be a reference to some special revelation which had not been known in old days. Salvation by Christ had assuredly been revealed in the older Scriptures (Gen. 12:3; Isa. ch. 53), and we are also told that Christ "illuminated" older truths through the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10, Greek). And yet in the parallel passage, Eph. 3:2-9, the mystery is said to have been hidden from all previous periods and not to have been announced until revealed to St. Paul. This seems to show that there must be something more in the word than mere salvation in Christ. The Ephesian passage clearly indicates that the reference is not to the salvation of Gentiles by Christ, which was no secret at all, but to the truth that the Gentiles should be associated with the Jews in one spiritual body on terms of perfect equality in Christ, and this, it would seem, is the meaning of the text here. Christ was to be in the Gentiles "the hope of glory" in its fullest sense, including all the blessings of the Gospel. Gentile believers are to enjoy the hope of supreme glory, and Jewish Christians can obviously have nothing more than this. If, therefore, this is the meaning of the passage, as it certainly is of Ephesians, the truth refers to Christian fellowship, Gentile believers being equally enriched in the fulness of the blessing of Christ. This would mean not only equality of acceptance in Christ, but equality of association in the Church, which is His Body.

The three words are also well worthy of notice in the

reverse order "mystery" "glory," "wealth." Dr. F. B. Meyer has somewhere used the apt illustration of a man coming to his old home, after many years of absence in a foreign country, and sitting down with his mother to a meal. At first she does not recognise him, and this means "mystery"; then he reveals himself to her, and the result is the "glory of the mystery"; and, lastly, he tells her of his wonderful prosperity in the far country, and of the riches he has brought home to her, and this is the "wealth of the glory of the mystery." So it is in things spiritual; at first we do not realise all that is stored up in Christ, but He reveals Himself to us, and in that revelation will be found the "riches of His grace." This is the great and precious thought of the Apostle when he says of God, "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also freely with Him give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32.)

II. The Theme of the Ministry

The passage tells us four things which sum up the essential features of Christian preaching. It is the proclamation of a Person, "Whom" we preach. While it is true, of course, that in a sense we can also speak of "what" we preach, yet this is only secondary. The theme of Christianity is not a theory, not a set of rules, not simply a code of morals, not even a system of truth, but a living Person and all these in Him. It is the peculiar characteristic of the religion of Christ that we cannot take the message and put aside the Speaker of the message. There are great teachers in the world, like Confucius, Socrates, Buddha, Mohammed, in whose writings may be found many truths, but those truths can be enjoyed without any reference to the person who uttered them. The sacred books of the East may be read and appreciated without knowing or caring who wrote

them. But it is altogether different with the teaching of Christ, for His Person is inextricably bound up with His teaching. All that He says centres round Himself. If He speaks of the kingdom, He is the King; if He declares the terms of entrance, it is faith in Him. The cause He advocated, the salvation He brought, the future He promised, all depend on Himself.

This Person is explained in the text in one word, "Christ." Here come in the facts of His life and work in order to show the value of His person. The word "Christ" means a great deal to the Jews, for it is the equivalent of their word "Messiah," the Anointed One, and in it are comprised all God's purposes and preparations for the redemption of mankind. It looks back to Old Testament scenes from the Garden of Eden, through type and prophecy, to the time of our Lord. It means the One set apart as Prophet, Priest, and King; Prophet to reveal, Priest to redeem, and King to rule.

Then follow two little words, "in you," and without these the former truth would be virtually useless. The Objective Person, Christ, must be inwardly appropriated. It is not enough that He came, lived, died, and rose. He must be personally abiding in the heart of each one. Those who accept intellectually the facts of Christ's Person and Work find that these avail them not, until they have made Christ personally their own in the confidence of the heart. Christ must be welcomed into the soul and dwell there by faith.

The chain is completed by the phrase, "the hope of glory," which refers to the future, as the other two truths refer to past and present. It is impossible to avoid inquiring about and looking towards the future. With the uncertainty of life we naturally ask whether we can be sure of the life to come, and the only answer is, "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It is sin that makes

the future uncertain, and when this is put away through the acceptance of Christ, all fear of the future goes with it, and with the consciousness that Christ is ours we face the future confidently and cheerfully, knowing that the possession of Him is the pledge and foretaste of future blessedness. Thus, we see that Christ is All-sufficient.

This, then, is the blessed and glorious theme of the ministry: Christ the Divine Person; the Anointed Saviour; the Revealer of God; the Atonement for Sin; the Guide, Satisfaction, and Completion of Life; the Refuge of the Past; the Stay of the Present; the Hope of the Future.

III. The Methods of the Ministry

We must now see how this great Theme is to be brought in contact with men, and, again, there are four thoughts to ponder. The Apostle speaks first of "warning." This is especially necessary in the case of those who have not received Christ, because it tells of sin and its sure results. Yet even afterwards this method must be prominent, because believers are often apt to have superficial views of sin and its consequences. "Warning" is like salt, which prevents surrounding corruption, and may be described as the moral aspect of Christianity. The New Testament claims to apply the principles of Christ to every part of life, and the Christian preacher and teacher needs to sound this note of "warning" to the indifferent and careless, to the presumptuous and wilful, to show them their dangers and to claim their lives for Christ.

Then will follow "teaching." This seems to have special reference to those who have begun the Christian life, and may, perhaps, be called the intellectual side of the Gospel. Teaching is needed at every stage of the journey, for the Christian religion is essentially educational. At every step of life's pathway, from the beginning to the end,

we need the fingerpost of Divine teaching, saying, "This is the way; walk ye in it." Teaching is not merely to be a quiet resting-place, but a fresh starting-point, informing the mind and guiding the soul in everything.

The words "every man" are found three times in this one verse, and they show clearly the Apostle's idea. The false teachers against whom he was writing had much to say of a wisdom for a peculiar few only, but St. Paul's soul spurned such restriction and rejoiced in the Gospel for all. He maintains that Christianity also has a wisdom, but it is for everybody, and the doors are flung open and all are invited to enter. This is the universality of the Gospel, involving a message for all nations, all capacities, all stations of life, a message for rich and poor, old and young, respectable and outcast, peer and peasant, because, amid all the differences of sphere and capacity, there is the same sin, the same heart, the same need, and therefore the same salvation.

But these words "every man" also suggest the individual application of the Gospel, not only a message for all, but a message for each, the Christian preacher being able to say, "I have a message from God unto *thee*." This individual and solitary aspect needs to be emphasised. Our lives are our own, and, notwithstanding our surroundings, each one of us lives in a little world of his own. And so God's truth comes to man alone, dealing with him as an individual, not merely as one of a number.

The phrase "in all wisdom" further emphasises the difference between the false teachers and St. Paul. He claimed to teach every single man all the wisdom that he could grasp, dealing with him according to his nature and as far as his capacity allowed. As each man has his own peculiar characteristics, it was St. Paul's aim to deal with him wisely by giving him food convenient, and all that he could accept and assimilate.

IV. The Object of the Ministry

Why does the Apostle do all this work? He has a definite aim, a specific object, in what he has to preach and teach. This is first suggested by the word "perfect," which means here, as often elsewhere, maturity, ripeness of character and experience. The term "perfection" never means sinlessness, but almost always the mature in contrast with the immature believer. From the moment of our conversion we are to make progress until we all arrive at the full ripeness of our position in Christ (Eph. 4:13).

This maturity is intended for all, and once again the Apostle emphasises this by using the term "every man." No sin must be excused, no weakness palliated, even with differences of capacity. Each capacity must be and can be ripe and mature up to its limits. The motive is further explained by the term "in Christ Jesus," showing that all this is to be realised, not in ourselves, but in Him. As "in Christ" is the source of our life here, so "in Christ" will be the source of our maturity hereafter. It is specially notable that we start here below with "Christ in us," and we end yonder above with ourselves "in Christ."

But there is another word which must not be overlooked, "that we may present." Here is the beautiful picture of the minister presenting his converts to Christ, introducing them, as such, to Him. As we have seen, the thought finds a threefold illustration in the New Testament (2 Cor. 11:2; Eph. 5:27; Col. 1:22). Just as at the royal levee or drawing-room some are presented to the king or queen by others, so here we have the picture of the minister presenting his disciples to the Master. This is the goal of the Christian worker; for this he lives and labours. Happy is the man who is thus privileged; it is the highest possible joy.

V. The Accompaniment of the Ministry

The Apostle not only preached, but worked (v. 29), and everything he said and did was with reference to the end, "whereunto I labour also." His position as an Apostle of Christ involved far more than a mere proclamation of the Gospel. It included effort and fatigue. Like an athlete in a contest, the Apostle strove with all his might, and yet there was the inspiration that, whilst he worked, Christ was working also, and in proportion as the Apostle laboured, Christ strove mightily in him to accomplish all this purpose. It is one of the most encouraging assurances of Christian service that our work may and can be done in exact proportion to God's work in us. "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to work" (Phil. 2:13). In all our service, therefore, let us keep in mind that, as we labour, we are striving according to His working, which worketh in us mightily.

As we review this wonderful passage, telling of ministry, we cannot help noticing with wonder and thankfulness (1) the magnificence of the theme, (2) the simplicity of the purpose, (3) the thoroughness of the method, and (4) the reality of the life. May God enable us to be equally faithful "ministers of His that do His pleasure."

CHAPTER XI

Spiritual Concern, 2:1-5

THE division of chapters at this point is somewhat misleading, because it tends to prevent our observing that the subject is continuous, dealing with St. Paul's own ministry. The opening word "for" clearly shows the connection. He has already referred to his preaching and effort on behalf of the Christians in Colosse, and now he will show that he has anxiety as well. It is a wonderful unveiling of a minister's heart, a revelation of his true attitude to Christian converts. Each point calls for special meditation as expressive of what the real Christian worker ought to be and do.

I. The Prayer

He wishes them to know of his intense effort on their behalf, and he uses, as elsewhere, the figure of the athlete (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). The conflict to which he refers shows his earnestness (1:29; 4:12), and at the same time his unselfish sympathy. All this is the more remarkable because the Apostle was not personally known to the Colossian Christians, and when anxiety is felt for those who are unknown, the reality of the feeling, as well as the consciousness of the peril, are the more readily understood.

II. The Purpose

This effort and conflict of prayer had a definite object.—

1. "That their hearts may be comforted." The heart is, as always, the centre of the moral being, including intellect, feeling, and will, and the word rendered "comforted" has a threefold meaning, embracing strength,

courage and consolation. The Apostle wishes them to be strong, fearless, and full of good cheer against the errors that face them.

2. Then he desired that they should be "knit together in love." The word translated "knit together" means "compacted," or harmoniously fitted (Eph. 4:16), and this is to be in the bond of love, doubtless referring to God's love to us in Christ.

3. All this was to lead to "all riches of the full assurance of understanding." There was to be no vagueness or uncertainty in their lives, but the very opposite, a certitude that would enable them to meet every peril with courageous confidence. Assurance is the purpose of God in connection with Christianity (Luke 1:4), and when writing to the Thessalonians the Apostle spoke of his gospel as having come to them "in much assurance" (1 Thess. 1:5). It is interesting to notice that the word found here occurs in three different connections; the "full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10:22), referring specially to the past; the "full assurance of hope" (Heb. 6:11), referring solely to the future; and this passage, "the full assurance of understanding," with its definite bearing on the present. The Apostle was particularly desirous that these people should enter fully into the certitude that comes with true Christianity.

III. The Privilege

Everything was intended to lead up to a knowledge of "the mystery of God, even Christ." As in a former passage (1:27), "mystery" means a secret once hidden but now revealed, and Christ was the specific "mystery" which they were to know. In Him were hidden "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and thereby they were shown that there was no need to go outside Christ for all the knowledge, wisdom, and certitude which they

rightly needed. The emphasis on the word "are" indicates that these things were realities, and that in possessing Christ they possessed all things.

IV. The Precaution

At this point the Apostle tells the Colossian Christians that he is saying this in order that they may not be led astray. He does not for a moment assume that they had wandered, but only warns them against the possibility. In every connection it can be said without hesitation that the only safeguard against error is a full knowledge of Christ.

V. The Peril

The particular danger that lay before them was that of false reasoning based on persuasive speech. It was on account of this peril that he had spoken so strongly about himself (v. 1), about them (v. 2), and about Christ (v. 3). People are easily influenced by forms of speech, and very often a charm of manner and an eloquent utterance will hide the falsity of the reasoning of the speaker.

VI. The Praise

And yet although the Apostle spoke in this way he was not unmindful of the reality and strength of the Colossian Christians. He was absent in the flesh, but he was present with them in the spirit, looking with joy upon them and feeling satisfied that all was well with them, even though they were surrounded by danger. This is a fine feature of the true Christian worker who sees the good points in those whom he wishes to help, and by recognising their strength he encourages them to greater efforts in the same direction.

VII. The Power

The specific point of his appreciation is what he calls their "order" and the "strength" of their faith towards Christ. By most writers this phrase is thought to be a military term, meaning "orderly array."

As we look over these words which are such a wonderful outpouring of the Apostle's soul, we notice three special points which are particularly applicable to the ministry, though they are, of course, true of all who are "watching for souls."

1. *Ministerial Concern.* The Apostle here, as in many other places, is particularly desirous that believers should lead the fullest, strongest, and best life, and for this reason he prays for them, as he so often does elsewhere. There is no doubt that the life of God's people, when fully lived, is one of the best testimonies to the reality of the Gospel.

2. *Ministerial Caution.* Notwithstanding the satisfaction that the Apostle felt in viewing the genuineness of these Christians, he could not help giving them a word of warning against specious and deadly foes. His whole soul pulsed with reality, and he shrank from anything like "persuasive speech," and false arguments which might easily lead astray the unwary and unstable. The day of peril is not over, and there are many today who are easily captured by modern cults of various kinds. They are so persuasive as to endanger the spiritual life of people by their erroneous reasoning. And so the need of caution is as great as ever.

3. *Ministerial Conviction.* The one and sufficient safeguard against every form of danger was the Person and Word of the Lord Jesus Christ as "God manifest in the flesh," and as possessing in Himself everything that the soul could need for time and eternity. The Apostle was certain that if only there came to be a personal and ever-

increasing experience of Christ there would be a sufficient protection against all foes. It is exactly the same today. Whatever errors may be prevalent, however many and specious may be the perils, the panoply of God is union and communion with Christ, in all the fulness of His Divine Person, redeeming work, risen life, and constant fellowship. Given this, all will be well.

CHAPTER XII

Peril and Protection, 2:6-10a

AFTER the preceding verses, with their strong emphasis on Christ, it might seem as though anything further on this subject was unnecessary, but the Apostle feels that this great theme must be mentioned again, so intense is his concern to see these Christians steadfast in the true faith.

I. The Appeal (vs. 6, 7)

He thereupon speaks to them of the necessity of continuing as they had begun. They had received Christ Jesus the Lord by faith (John 1:12), and they were to keep on walking in Him. Each part of this title is noteworthy. He is "the Christ," the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Divinely commissioned Person. He is "Jesus," the human, and historical personage. He is "the Lord," with all that this means of supreme control. This was the sum and substance of their Christian life. They had accepted our Saviour in this threefold way. He was the Divine Messiah, the human Jesus, and the supreme Lord. They were to continue as they had started, expressing their life in consistent conduct in union with Him. This thought of "walking" is familiar in these Epistles, and the idea is that of complete and continuous manifestation in character and conduct of everything involved in the reception of Christ Jesus the Lord.

Then follow three significant participles, all referring to the further progress of the Christian life. "Having been rooted." This is the first metaphor, implying that they had been permanently fixed in the right soil. Then the metaphor changes, and also the tense as well, and

the Apostle speaks of their being "continually built up." The thought is that of Christ as the foundation of a building on which the Colossian Christians were continually being built. Then comes the third thought of being "continually made steadfast." This is another present tense, implying continuous experience. Lightfoot thinks that "faith" here is like the cement of the building which helps to strengthen and solidify the structure. The Apostle very beautifully bears witness to the reality of the instruction they had received from Epaphras, for he mentions all this as "according as ye were taught." It is not enough for evangelists to win men for Christ; they must instruct them in those principles of Christian living which alone can safeguard the soul, and prevent it from backsliding.

With another change of metaphor the Apostle speaks of these Christians "abounding in thanksgiving," and the thought of thankfulness in this connection is singularly suggestive and impressive. Bengel makes one of his characteristic comments in saying that "thanksgiving makes lawful and makes glad, and shows the use of things which others load with prohibitions." And, similarly, Bishop Moule says that "there is a great and profoundly reasonable power in holy thanksgiving to bring home to the soul the reality of the treasure for which the thanks are given" (*Colossian Studies,* p. 130). And again, after referring to the classical legend of the Sirens and Ulysses, he remarks: "No heart is more vulnerable to doubt and to spiritual delusion than the unthankful heart which will not walk in the sunshine of the Lord" (p. 131). No fewer than six times in this brief Epistle is this thought of thanksgiving to be found (1:3, 12; 3:15, 17; 4:2, and here).

II. The Warning (v. 8)

Now, the caution already given (v. 4) is developed into a reference to a special peril, and he appeals to them not to allow themselves to be deceived, because it would involve their being ensnared and secured as a prey. The exact expression of the original shows that the danger was not imaginary, but present and pressing. The word rendered "maketh spoil" is only found here in the New Testament, and is rendered by Lightfoot, "carries you off body and soul." They had been rescued from the power of darkness (1:12, 13), and they were to watch lest they were taken back into a far worse condition. The danger was that of a pretended knowledge, "a philosophy which is a specious make-believe." The phrase is, perhaps, to be rendered "vain, deceitful philosophy." The word "philosophy" is found only here in the New Testament, and the accent of scorn associated with it is particularly noteworthy. Christianity is not primarily a philosophy, even though Christ is "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 2:6-16). He is wisdom because He is life, and the various problems associated with philosophy, such as those of existence, nature, life, man and God, are all to be considered in the light of Christ as the special life of the soul. It is a great mistake to think that every form of philosophy is capable of being harmonised with Christianity. The two rocks on which most philosophies split are those of sin and redemption, and no system of thought can be regarded as worthy of the name which does not reckon with and find a place for human depravity and divine salvation. As Bishop Moule points out, the trouble at Colosse and the trouble in modern days as well is that philosophy so often contradicts Christ, and is not "according to Him." Men often want "a Christ according to the system of thought, not a system of

thought according to the blessed Christ" (p. 142). And yet this does not mean any disparagement of the intellect, for the word of Christ is as clear as ever, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy . . . . *mind,*" and everyone knows the marvellous effects on the thinking powers when a man receives Christ as his life. "Let a man of elevated and penetrated understanding get a true view of the Christ of God, as the Word shows Him, and the Spirit glorifies Him, and he will have a subject matter for his whole mental power such as he never had before" (Moule, p. 143).

This hollow and pretended knowledge is further described as "according to the tradition of men, according to the rudiments of the world." It was evidently a matter of silly trifling, of empty sham, of idle fancy. In another passage (Gal. 4:3, 9) the word rendered "rudiments" is applied to Jewish ceremonialism, while here the same idea seems to be applied to paganism. It is natural for modern applications to be made in regard to the bearing of this on ceremonialism in worship, and, as Maclaren points out, "enlisting the senses as the allies of the spirit in worship is risky work" (*Colossians,* p. 192), especially because, while they are thought to be helpful to the soul in approaching God, they are just as likely to prove harmful, and even disastrous. "The gratification of taste and the excitation of æsthetic sensibility, which are the results of such aids to worship, are not worship, however they may be mistaken as such. All ceremonial is in danger of becoming opaque instead of transparent, as it was meant to be" (p. 193).

It is not surprising, therefore, that a great preacher should dare to say that "of the two extremes, a Quaker meeting is nearer the ideal of Christian worship than High Mass," and that "a Christianity making much of forms and ceremonies is a definite retrogression and descent."

It has truly been urged that we must be particularly careful lest we mistake the worship of music for music in worship. Worship is something that goes far deeper than the senses, though often when our senses are stirred we think our worship is acceptable. But no worship is worthy of the name that does not penetrate to the spirit, and does not express itself in genuineness and reality (John 4:23, 24).

III. The Safeguard (vs. 9, 10a)

Once again the Apostle refers to Christ as the protection against this specious and deadly danger. In Him dwells permanently the entire fulness of Deity in a bodily form, and in Him believers are permanently filled full. In the Incarnation of Christ (John 1:14) is found the complete revelation and possession of God, and there is no need for believers to seek for anything else, because in Him they reach their full life (John 1:16). The word "Godhead" is found only here, and is usually understood to mean Deity, or God's essential nature as distinct from Divinity or the qualities of the Godhead (Rom. 1:20). It is a clear indication of what the Apostle thought of Christ.

The theme of the entire section is Christ, and even the prepositions are noteworthy. From verses 6-11 "in" occurs six times, while in verse 8 there is "according to," and in verse 13, as we shall see, "with." The various elements and aspects of Christ, as here indicated, should be thoroughly and constantly kept in mind.

1. *Christ the Foundation* (5:7). This is the basis of all true life (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:9-15).

2. *Christ the Sphere.* The various references to our being "in Him" show that union and communion with Christ is the protection and satisfaction of the soul.

3. *Christ the Life.* All through this passage the believer

is regarded as united to a living Saviour, who is both God and man.

4. *Christ the Soil* (v. 7). The believer as permanently rooted in Christ has struck his roots into a soil that remains fruitful because he is "planted by the rivers of water."

5. *Christ the Pathway* (v. 6). We are to walk in Him who is at once the way and the goal. Thus Christ is to be received, and then the Christian is rooted in Him, built up in Him, made steadfast in Him, walking in Him, and all the while abounding in thanksgiving. So for doctrine and duty, character and conduct, life and labour, thought and deed, word and work, "Christ is all, and in all."

CHAPTER XIII

The Believer's Safety, 2:10b-15

THIS section elaborates and amplifies the teaching of verse 10a by showing the practical details of what is meant by being "in Christ." As He is complete, we also are complete in Him.

I. Our Position

Several figures of speech are used to indicate the spiritual position of every believer.

1. *Circumcision* (v. 11). It is natural to turn from the subject of the worship of angels to this aspect of Paul's teaching. It was entirely unnecessary for Christians to submit to the Jewish external rite, which after all was only a symbol of what the followers of Christ possessed in spiritual reality. Lightfoot and others point out three contrasts between the physical and spiritual aspect: (a) The character of the circumcision is inward and spiritual, not fleshly. (b) It covers the whole of sinful tendencies and is not limited in extent to one part alone. (c) Its author is divine, not human; Christ, not Moses. The spiritual meaning of circumcision seems to be purity and consecration to God. We read of the circumcision of the ear (Jer. 6:10), of the lips (Exod. 6:12), and of the heart (Lev. 26:41). It was thus at once a figure of putting off the old nature and of regarding our life as entirely devoted to God. And as believers of Christ possess the spiritual reality, there was of course no need to submit to the outward ceremony.

2. *Burial.* As in Romans 6:4, the Apostle teaches that when Christ was buried, we are regarded as having been

buried with Him, thus once more emphasising the essential oneness of the believer with Christ at every stage.

3. *Resurrection.* Again the believer is shown to be identified with Christ, being raised with Him (Eph. 2:6). Our union with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection is one of those spiritual realities which form the basis of everything else in the Christian life.

4. *Quickening.* The resurrection is shown to be followed by the gift of a new life. God not only raised us up in and with Christ, but also imparted a new life in contrast with the spiritual death which comes by reason of our sin.

II. Our Privileges

Arising out of this spiritual position come blessings and privileges in daily living.

1. *Forgiveness* (v. 13). Sin is here symbolised as a debt, and there is scarcely anything more suggestive than the thought that when we have nothing to pay, God freely and fully remits the obligation (Luke 7:42).

2. *Deliverance* (v. 14). This is a further statement of what is involved in pardon. The "bond" is used to indicate our obligation to perform legal obedience, but owing to our inability to meet the debt, Christ has cancelled and erased it, and thus removed all that faced us, because it was quite impossible for us to satisfy God's requirements by our own efforts. God's Law, for which we are responsible, is "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," and when it is said that the bond is "against us" or opposed to us, it suggests the validity of the Law in relation to us. We are debtors to it, and yet we are absolutely incapable of meeting its demands. But Christ has fulfilled the Law for us and has thereby cancelled it, and the Apostle gives a vivid picture of Christ nailing the cancelled document to His cross in token of His complete victory. Thus the

Law is now powerless to insist upon our obedience or to inflict any punishment, because the death of Christ has entirely destroyed it, so far as obligation to obey it for salvation is concerned.

3. *Victory* (v. 15). Not only was the writing erased, but the bond itself was torn up and cast aside, and this was due to the fact that Christ won a complete victory over all the hostile powers which were endeavoring to keep back the sinner and prevent him from accepting Christ. The thought of these words seems on the whole to be well stated by the translation of the A. V., which is followed by the American Version. It tells of Christ having triumphed completely over the evil powers, and of His having taken them captive (2 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 6:12). The main truth seems to be the completeness of Christ's victory over evil. Bishop Moule very appropriately introduces at this point these verses of the hymn:

He gave me back the bond;
It was a heavy debt;
And as He gave, He smil'd, and said,
"Thou wilt not Me forget."
He gave me back the bond;
The seal was torn away;
And as He gave, He smil'd, and said,
"Think thou of Me alway."

* * * * *

It is a bond no more,
But it shall ever tell
All that I ow'd was fully paid
By my Emmanuel.

III. Our Power

It necessarily follows that those who occupy this spiritual position and enjoy these spiritual privileges possess

spiritual power for practical life. The following aspects are suggested:

1. *Union* (vs. 11, 12). The emphasis on the word "in" very plainly shows that the source of all spiritual power lies in the union of the soul with Christ. Nothing can take the place of this, while from it everything else follows.

2. *Fellowship* (v. 13). This is indicated by the word "with," for we are not only buried and raised in Christ, but "with" Him, thereby suggesting a spiritual fellowship that arises out of union.

3. *Faith* (v. 12). All this is associated with a definite confidence in God as the Object of our trust. It is important to keep in mind that the exercise of faith in God is the Source of all spiritual strength and blessing. Scripture is very emphatic in regard to the way faith links us to God as the means of obtaining grace and power.

As we review this passage, it is important to notice two thoughts:

1. *Spiritual Completeness.* This is especially connected with the Cross. Through the death of Christ, we obtain forgiveness of sins, the abrogation of Law, and victory over the power of sin. There are few things more impressive in the New Testament than the wonderful variety of truth connected with the death of Christ. It is the ground of our pardon, the basis of our peace, the secret of our purity, and the source of our power. No wonder that the Apostle cried, "God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. *Comfort.* The comfort of the passage is equally inspiring. We can look backward, and outward, and onward, and know that all is well. The law which was hostile to us is entirely destroyed. The power of sin, which held us in bondage, is completely broken. The rites and ceremonies of religion, so far as they are concerned

with our justification, are done away in Christ, and to return to them, would mean that Christ is not enough. As a writer has said, "Dead men have nothing to do with ordinances." They were useless to us when we were dead in sin, and we are useless to them now, because we are dead with Christ. Thus we rejoice as we contemplate past, present, and future, and thankfully recognize that "Christ is All."

CHAPTER XIV

The Twofold Appeal, 2:16-19

HERE comes the application of verses 8-15, first in regard to practical matters (vs. 16, 17), and then in reference to doctrinal questions (vs. 18, 19). Because of what Christ has done for us, we are to beware of every form of error.

I. The First Appeal (vs. 16, 17)

The serious danger is that of the loss of Christian liberty, and this is the point of "therefore." Because Christ has cancelled the bond of the law and has forever destroyed it, and since He has gained complete victory over all powers of evil, Christians are to beware of becoming entangled again in anything that would lead them from Christ and from the fulness of their privileges in Him. The argument is much the same as that in Galatians 5:1. Because believers are free they are not to yield themselves again to subjection to that from which they have been so completely delivered. It is generally thought that the dangers against which the Apostle warns the Colossians are both Jewish and Oriental, the former referring to the law and the latter to the question of angelic mediation. It is the first of these which he specially emphasises in these two verses. He urges them not merely against the observance of these things, but against those who would call them to account for not observing them, and he specifies five matters. Eating and drinking are of course questions of unimportance because God's kingdom is not a matter of food and drink (Rom. 14:17), but of things spiritual. The "feast" is a reference to the annual festivals of the Jews, like the Passover, and the "new

moon" is an allusion to the sacrifice on the first day of every month (Num. 28:11). The mention of the Sabbath Day is clearly that of the Jewish Sabbath as one of those legal institutions from which we are set free in Christ. No one must for an instant suppose that the observance of the Sabbath Day can in any way procure or help to procure salvation. But the Sabbath is something infinitely greater than a merely Jewish institution, for it was made "for man" and dates from the creation. There is scarcely anything more significant than the fact that just as the Jewish institution was being brought to an end Christ called himself "the Lord of the Sabbath." Thus Christ's cancelling of the bond set aside the Sabbath as Jewish, but at the same time because we are "under law to Christ," we have the Sabbath, or Lord's Day, as a divine institution dating from the beginning and intended for permanent observance. Christian men will therefore rejoice in their liberty from everything purely Jewish and will at the same time observe with devotion the day of rest which God has appointed for spirit, soul, and body. While Christ resolutely set aside the deplorable bondage which Jewish teaching had associated with the Sabbath, He taught that by the Sabbath being "made for man," it was intended to prevent constant absorption in worldly affairs and to enable body, mind, and soul to have that cessation from work which would enable man to do what God intended him to do. As a thoughtful writer has pointed out, "at the creation of the human race God instituted the weekly day of worship and rest; and he did so to the universal good of man." This is our supreme and sufficient authority for the weekly cessation from toil, and the opportunity thus given for worship and intellectual rest. When this is properly understood it will enable men to realise the will of God, and although there are those who with what may perhaps be called hyperspirituality

speak of every day being a sabbath, facts prove beyond question that the observance of the Lord's Day is one of the most essential features of all true spiritual life, and that spirituality is not furthered by thinking of every day as exactly alike.

The reason why all these things are not to be allowed to encroach upon Christian liberty is that they are a mere shadow of spiritual realities (v. 17). Like the law in general, which was a shadow of the good things to come (Heb. 10:1), these things typified what was found and fulfilled in Christ. Thus eating and drinking are symbols of spiritual food (John 6:51-56). The festivals are a type of that continuous festival which is ours in Christ (1 Cor. 5:8, Greek). The Jewish feast days were, like the Passover, anticipatory of Christ (1 Cor. 5:7), while the Jewish Sabbath was a suggestion of the Sabbath of the soul, which is the believer's privilege today, and of the eternal rest hereafter for the people of God (Heb. 4:9).

II. The Second Appeal (vs. 18, 19)

The next call is even more imperative. The word used is very rare and seems to refer to the decision of an umpire. Lightfoot, together with the English and the American Revised Version, render "rob you of your prize," explaining that the false teachers at Colosse are considered to be persons frustrating those who would otherwise have won the prize. Other writers translate the words "let no one give judgment against you," and this certainly is the force of the original word, which occurs only here. In either case it means that no one is to be defrauded of his proper position by being compelled to submit to those things, because submission would involve the loss of Christian liberty. Any one who attempted to do this would be taking pleasure in a wrong kind of humility. But what is the meaning of humility here, and

to whom is the reference? Most writers interpret the words of a humility which led men to worship angels thinking God was unapproachable except through the mediation of celestial beings. If this is the meaning, then of course the humility is false, the word being used ironically, because the Christian knows well that he has not the slightest need to approach God through any such channels, but can enter the divine presence direct. But it is somewhat difficult to realise that these Colossian saints needed a warning against angel-worship, unless of course they were so indoctrinated in the Oriental conception of the necessity of stages between themselves and God. One writer maintains that the reference is to the religious humility entertained by angels, to the humble position which they take, veiling their faces before God because they do not possess the same boldness of access as Christians do (Rom. 5:2). This would mean that as Christians stand before God in Christ no one is to allow them to be robbed of this standing and make them willing to accept a lower position through a false humility. Either of these views makes good sense, though the former is far more universally endorsed, and the latter is somewhat less easy to follow. Another difficulty in this passage is in regard to the reading. The Revised Version reads, "dwelling in the things which he hath seen," while the Authorised Version inserts the word "not," "which he hath *not* seen." The textual authorities seem to be equally divided, though it is thought that the balance favors the omission of the negative as giving the harder reading, which according to the usual principle is more likely to have been the original. If we omit the negative it means that such a person as is here mentioned was only concerned with what his fleshly mind could see, the only standing he could comprehend. He could not stand or walk by faith. Or it may be that it refers to him as

"going into subtle explanations regarding his visions." These false teachers made pretensions to know supernatural things by means of visions, yet this pretension to a knowledge of the invisible world did not rest on faith but was the result of vanity of the flesh. The word rendered "intruding" in the A. V. is translated "dwelling" in the R. V. (margin, "taking his stand on"). Sir William Ramsay has shown that it was a technical term in the mystery-religions of St. Paul's day, and probably means "putting foot on the threshold" or entering on the new life of the initiated. This practically agrees with the R. V. Bishop Moule favors the retention of the word "not," and of course in this case the meaning will be that the man who talks about the worship of angels is dealing with things about which he knows nothing. In either case the thought is that these Colossian saints were not to be defrauded of their true standing in Christ.

A reason is given for this appeal. It is because such an attitude involves the Christian in the error of "not holding fast the Head" (v. 10). It would mean disloyalty to Christ, because all the false teaching was of the flesh and was not derived from Him. On the other hand, those who were right with God in Christ would find that every part of the body was receiving grace direct from God and was growing continually in and through Him Who is the Head. The erroneous teaching proved that the holder was not a member of that body of which Christ is the Head, because that body is in vital and direct connection with Christ, and is continually growing by the intercommunion between every part of it. Indeed the passage speaks in very wonderful language of "the increase of God," as though God grew when His people grew through union with Christ. Lightfoot defines this phrase as "that which partakes of God, which belongs to God, which has its abode in God. Thus the finite is

truly united with the Infinite; the end which the false teachers strove in vain to compass is attained." Bishop Moule interprets it to mean developing a holiness and power of which God is the Source and Secret and Environment; "nothing between." Maclaren says the increase will come from God, and be pleasing to Him because it will be the growth of His own life in the body, since "there is an increase not of God."

This passage suggests by its reference to Christ the essential position and privileges of the believer. (a) In verses 9 and 10 Christ is the Head, and the believer has his *position* in Him. (b) Here in verse 19 Christ is also shown to be the Head, but the thought is of *progress.* We are complete in Him in regard to our place, and we are also nourished by and built up in Him because He is our Head. Thus every part of the believer's life is fully met by the ample provision, and because of this genuine, blessed, and satisfying substance he is urged to avoid anything that would keep him living in the shadows. We must not allow ourselves to be defrauded of any blessing that is ours in union and communion with our Divine Lord and Head.

CHAPTER XV

Facts and Factors, 2:20-23

FROM the doctrinal, the Apostle now turns to the practical, from theology to morality, and he proceeds to show the utter impossibility of any Christian doing that against which he had been warning and speaking so strongly. He does this on two grounds. They had "died with Christ" (2:20), and had been "raised with Christ" (3:1). On the proper meaning of these two spiritual facts, their entire practical life turned.

I. The Safe Position (v. 20)

The Christian is here described as having "died with Christ from the rudiments of the world." The tense of the word "died" implies a definite time in the past. This, from the standpoint of God, was when Christ Himself died on the cross, but so far as the believer's own life was involved, it took place the moment he received Christ, as his personal Saviour. Death always means separation, and this is the reason why it is described as "from the rudiments of the world." It is important that the believer should recognise this death with Christ as an absolute fact, and not as something to which he is to submit for the purpose of obtaining an experience of it. It is an absolute, an accomplished fact, whether he experiences it or not. There are several statements in the New Testament to prove that when Christ died the believer died also (Rom. 6:8, 11; Col. 2:11, 12).

The words "with Christ" show that Christ Himself is also regarded as having died "from the rudiments of the world." This seems to mean, first of all, that as He was "made under the law" He was of course under obliga-

tion to fulfil the law during His earthly life, but that when He died this obligation necessarily came to an end. Furthermore, His death was the fulfilment of these requirements in the sense that He was the reality to which they all pointed, so that His death was their abolition. It is for this reason that the Apostle is so strong in insisting upon the believer dying with Christ, for if Christ died from these rudiments, they can no longer be of any authority over the believer. Nothing is to interfere with the perfect liberty of the Christian in his union with Christ, for in Christ he died to sin (Rom. 6:2), to self (2 Cor. 5:15), and to the law (Gal. 2:19).

If it should be said, as it has more than once been questioned, that this reference to ordinances seems to reflect on baptism and the Lord's Supper, the obvious reply is that these do not come under the same rule, because they are in no sense "rudiments of the world" or intended for the purpose of providing and guaranteeing salvation. They are Christian ordinances for use by believers as solemn pledges and assurances of grace, and provide just that touch with the material world which is a help, not a hindrance to spiritual life. The very simplicity of the ordinances, the only two in the Christian Church, clearly proves the impossibility of associating them with the Apostle's warning, unless of course they are used in the wrong sense to imply a guarantee of salvation. It may also be pointed out that pure and true Christianity has always been exceedingly simple, and free from elaborate ceremonial, because it is a universal experience that ceremonial is apt to lead the soul from Christ and involve it in a complexity of legalism.

II. The Solemn Protest (vs. 20, 22)

Based on this fact of the Christian having died with Christ, the question is naturally and forcibly put, "Why

do ye submit to the yoke of ordinances?" Christ had set them free from these things and they ought not to be capable of desiring to be again in slavery. The three prohibitions (v. 21) are apparently some of the requirements insisted on by the false teachers. As Maclaren says: "These three prohibitions are not Paul's but are quoted by him as the kind of rules and regulations which he is protesting against." Thus the Apostle puts them on their guard against these false teachers and shows that in the natural processes of eating and drinking all such things will perish by being used up. This constitutes their unimportance in regard to the spiritual life, and indeed they are characterised by being merely human and temporary, St. Paul quoting to this effect from Isaiah 29:13. It is significant that he shows how the teachings of men were being observed, even while God was being disobeyed. Thus these observances against which he was writing were merely human inventions, and, as a writer well puts it, the special force of this appeal is: "Ye who are in union with Christ, how can ye receive mere human precepts which contradict His will?"

III. The Spiritual Powerlessness (v. 23)

Furthermore, in submitting to these false methods of living, the Christian was really doing what was absolutely useless for spiritual power and blessing. These ordinances had nothing but a mere appearance of wisdom and were of no real value in remedying the indulgences of the flesh or destroying sin in the life. They constituted a religious service which was purely gratuitous on the part of the worshipper and one that was not sought or recognised as acceptable to God (v. 18). They were of the nature of will-worship, and while they made a pretense of great godliness and were garbed in the robe of humility, they were essentially marks of pride and really set aside the

finished work of Christ on our behalf. It is important to remember that severity of treatment meted out to the body has no power to remove and destroy the appetite or passions of the soul. Asceticism may try to prevent indulgence in sin but it is really incapable of overcoming evil. Thus it is futile as a remedy for any form of wrong, and the only way of dealing aright with the body is to regard it as part of the personality of the believer in union with Christ, and therefore by reason of that union, as dead to sin and alive to God.

Looking back over the entire passage from verse 8, it is seen that there is a threefold *peril.* They are warned against being deceived (v. 8), against being judged (v. 16), and against being defrauded (v. 18). There is still the same danger today. False religions, false philosophies, and false systems continue to do their utmost to bring the believer into bondage, and on this account we are to heed the solemn words found here.

But the *protection* is made as clear as the peril, and this is found all through the section, in union with Christ, our Head. Lightfoot points out that the discoveries of modern physiology have given the Apostle's language great distinctness and force, which even his own contemporaries could not have understood, for "at every turn we meet with some fresh illustration which kindles it with a flood of light." Christ as our Head contains wisdom for us. Christ as our Head conveys grace and power to us. Christ as our Head controls our lives and enables us to do His will. This is the force of the prayer in chapter 1, where wisdom, strength and the knowledge of God's will are all included. The more we can realise our assured union with Christ, and the more we yield ourselves by faith and surrender to the Lordship of Christ as our Head, the more effective will be our practical life, both in opposition to what is evil and in furtherance of what is good.

CHAPTER XVI

Resurrection Power, 3:1-4

HERE is given the second reason for not following the counsels of the false teachers. As the Christians were not to do this because they had died with Christ (2:20), so now they are led on to see that they are risen with Christ, and this in particular is a reason for not following any false way. To be dead with Christ carries with it resurrection, and now the Apostle will show that this is the genuine and adequate power against any indulgence of the flesh. Holy living is possible, but it must be realised in the right way, not in the wrong. We shall also see how all true life necessarily springs from true doctrine.

I. The Reminder (v. 1)

The Apostle first calls their attention to the fact they were "raised together with Christ," the word "if" implying "since." He assumes it as a fact and does not suggest any doubt. The resurrection is variously presented in the New Testament, and it is at once a proof, a pattern, a power, a prophecy, and a pledge. It is the proof of our acceptance of Christ's death and of our acceptance with Him (Rom. 4:25), it is to be the pattern of our holy life (Rom. 6:4), it is also the power for Christian character and service (Eph. 1:18-20); it contains the promise of our own resurrection (1 Thess. 4:14), and it is the pledge of our life hereafter (John 14:19).

In this passage our resurrection is associated with Christ (2:12) because we are united to Him in such a way that whatever He did, we are regarded by God as having done also (Rom. 6:8).

II. The Realisation (vs. 1, 2)

On account of this union with a living Christ, we are to do two things. First, we are to "seek those things that are above," and then we are to do still more, "set our mind on the things that are above." The word "mind" includes the entire personality and refers to the whole bent of our inner nature. We are to see that the tendency of our life is towards heavenly, not earthly things. The original word is very striking, implying concentration of every power on things heavenly (Phil. 2:2, 5; 3:19, 20; see also Matt. 6:33 and Gal. 5:26). This attitude naturally and necessarily follows from our union with Christ.

III. The Reason (v. 3)

Christ is now in heaven, seated on the right hand of God, and when He died we were united to Him in His death, and, as a consequence, in His resurrection. This means that as He is above, our life united to Him is "hid with Christ in God." The word "hid" is very suggestive because it means "has been permanently hidden," and the thought seems to include the two ideas of secrecy and safety. Our life is "hid" and therefore unseen by man. It is also "hid" and therefore incapable of being touched or hurt by any evil power. This is the glory of the Christian life, and it is not surprising that men from time to time have rejoiced in the consciousness of perfect safety in this union with Christ (see Bishop Moule, *Colossian Studies,* page 190).

IV. The Revelation (v. 4)

But this is not everything, for although the believer's life is now hidden, one day Christ will be made manifest and then the Christian also will be revealed with Him. Christ is described as "our life" and thus we are identified

with Him (1 John 5:12). Lightfoot has a very helpful comment on this thought of the believer's manifestation. "The veil which now shrouds your higher life from others, and even partly from yourselves, will then be withdrawn. The world, which persecutes, despises, ignores now, will then be blinded with the dazzling glory of the revelation." This is the inspiration of the Christian soul as he looks forward to that blessed hope when Christ shall appear and all His people appear with Him in glory (John 17:22; Rom. 8:19; Rev. 19:11-14).

This familiar and yet perennially wonderful passage is full of blessed teaching concerning Christ and the believer. (1) Christ is mentioned no fewer than four times, including His resurrection, His session above, His union with God, and His coming again. (2) The believer is also mentioned in connection with Christ in several ways. First comes our union with Christ, then follows our life hidden in Him, and lastly, the assurance is given of future manifestation. All this suggests and emphasises the one supreme lesson of the New Testament, that occupation with Christ is the secret of everything in the Christian life. The old word *Sursum Corda,* "lift up your hearts," is the only right attitude for salvation, sanctification, and satisfaction. Be it ours to respond with thankfulness, adoration and praise, "We lift them up unto the Lord."

CHAPTER XVII

Heaven and Earth, 3:5-11

SPURGEON is recorded to have said in his characteristically quaint way, that this chapter begins in heaven and ends in the kitchen. At this point comes an exhortation to practical living, based on the great truths of vs. 1-3.

I. The Appeal (v. 4)

Because their life is hid with Christ, they are exhorted to "put to death" their earthly members. The wrong way of living has already been shown (2:23), but since these believers had died with Christ (2:20) it was possible for them to carry out in their life the spiritual results, for union with Christ is at once our power and our pattern. The word rendered "put to death" or "mortify" implies a definite act, and is interpreted by Bishop Moule as "give to death." This means that they were to realise in practical life what is meant by "reckoning themselves dead to sin in Christ" (Rom. 6:11). We are to accept this as a fact and then live in the power of it. When the soul is conscious that Christ not only died for its salvation, but that it is united with Him in His death, there comes a power which enables it to live to God's praise and glory.

II. The Description (v. 5)

The sins mentioned here include moral actions and moral desires, and all of them are of course characteristic of "our members which are upon the earth." It is very impressive that "covetousness" is included in this statement, and is further described as idolatry. It shows that every evil desire, whatever form it may take, is really

equivalent to removing God from His place in our life as the Object of our worship and devotion. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

III. The Outcome (v. 6)

On account of these things, God's wrath is certain to come, both now and hereafter. The phrase "wrath of God" should be carefully noted here and elsewhere (Rom. 1:18; Eph. 5:6), for it means the divine judicial attitude to everything that is sinful. The solemn word "cometh" indicates the absolute certainty that this result will accrue.

IV. The Reminder (v. 7)

They are then told that these things formed part and parcel of their life in old days. The word "walk" always means the outward expression of life, the conduct which comes from the possession of life. It is frequently found in the Bible as indicative of the true outward behaviour of the believer (Gen. 17:1; Eph. 2:2; 4:17; 5:2). The connection between life and walk is the same as that between cause and effect. It was because they lived in this sphere that they manifested in their conduct that which was in agreement with it.

V. The Call (v. 8)

Then follows the earnest entreaty to put aside all the things mentioned and those that are now to be included (v. 8). The words "put off" are in the imperative mood and expressive of the disrobing of the Christian. It is as much as to say that as they have put off the old man (2:11), they were now to put off his clothes. The two general lines mentioned here are sins of uncharitableness and sins of insincerity. "Anger" is a sudden outburst of feeling; "malice" means sheer malignity; "slander" is a false accusation (v. 8). "Shameful" speaking seems to

refer to abusive and perhaps impure language. They were also to avoid everything that is untrue, for lying was a characteristic feature of their old life (v. 9).

VI. The Reason (v. 9)

All this was to be done because they had already put off the unregenerate self (v. 9) and had put on the new life in Christ, which was continually being renewed in the likeness of God (v. 10). This reference to their old and unconverted state, in contrast with their new position, is very impressive and demands thorough attention. It was a contrast between self and Christ, between the old life and the new, and every day this union with Christ was providing new life and power. The reference seems to be clearly to the fact of the original creation (Gen. 1:26, 27). Knowledge is, of course, spiritual experience, which in Christ makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Cor. 4:4; 2 Pet. 1:2-4).

VII. The Result (v. 11)

The word "cannot" (v. 11) shows the absolute impossibility of any of these distinctions being maintained in the Christian life. The first two are national, "Greek and Jew"; the second two are religious, "circumcision and uncircumcision"; the third two are racial, "Barbarian and Scythian"; the fourth two are natural, "bondman and freeman." To the Jew the human race was divided into two classes, Jews and Greeks, each of which scorned the other, and one writer remarks "that the Scythians were regarded as one of the lowest types of Barbarians. Cicero classes Scythians with Britons." The reference to "bond or free," is particularly important in view of the question of slavery in the days of St. Paul, and more particularly because of the fact that one of the messengers who carried this epistle was a runaway slave who was being sent back

to his master Philemon. The distinction of bond and free is destroyed in Christ, and Philemon was to receive back Onesimus as a brother beloved. The fact that no word is spoken in the New Testament about the emancipation of slaves is a striking testimony to the essential truth of oneness in Christ, for the abolition of slavery has grown out of the fundamental truth of Christianity that all are one in Christ.

As we review this vitally important and very practical passage, we notice: (1) the threefold call. They were to put to death their members (v. 5); they were to put off all that was wrong in word and deed (v. 8); and they were to realise that they had put on Christ (v. 10). (2) This is followed by a threefold reason. There was the certainty of divine judgment on sin (v. 6); they had put away the old habits (v. 9); and they were enjoying their new position of oneness and fellowship with Christ (v. 11).

CHAPTER XVIII

The Soul's Dress, 3:12-17

AFTER the negative comes the positive in the Christian life. Not only is the believer to put off the evils of the old life, he is also to put on the graces of the new life. In these verses a number of aspects of the Christian character and conduct are presented for practical realisation.

I. The Spiritual Attire (v. 12)

The Colossians are exhorted to clothe themselves with various elements of the spiritual life. The figure of clothing is found in several other passages (Rom. 13:14). The first necessity is "a heart of compassion," because with the affections right, everything else should follow. Then will come "kindness," the opposite of harshness and severity. The next feature will be "humility," the real thing as distinct from the unreal (2:18, 23). This will express itself in "meekness" and "longsuffering," the very opposite of everything rude and overbearing. Sir William Ramsay has called attention to the frequency with which St. Paul brings together the two ideas of meekness and lowliness, as though this were an echo of our Lord's well-known words (Matt. 11:28-30). Those who are humble in mind will naturally be slow to resent wrongs and will never for an instant contemplate revenge.

II. The Special Robe (v. 13)

Keeping up the figure of attire, it is noteworthy that so great prominence is given to the spirit of forbearance and forgiveness, for both here and elsewhere this Christian grace is made very prominent (Eph. 4:32; Rom.

15:7). In all matters of complaint and blame, this readiness to forgive should be shown, especially as it is the necessary outcome of Christ's forgiveness of us.

III. The Protecting Girdle (v. 14)

Again the figure of clothing is used and reference is made to the girdle by which the robes of an Eastern man were held together. It is interesting that there are three passages which speak of the girdle: the girdle of truth, (Eph. 6:14); the girdle of peace (Eph. 4:3); and here the girdle of love. Love is regarded as that which holds together the various Christian graces already mentioned.

IV. The Deciding Factor (v. 15)

At this point the reference is made to "the peace of Christ," which is to be allowed in the heart as the umpire or arbiter deciding and ruling the life. The word "rule" is suggestive of that which settles differences, especially where there is any conflict of thoughts and feelings. Under such circumstances the peace of Christ is to decide. The same idea and practically the same word is found in 2:18. It may be asked how peace is able to do this, and perhaps the explanation is that as peace with God is the result of our acceptance of Christ (Rom. 5:1), so experience of peace in the soul in union with Christ and through the presence of God will at once settle every difficulty and show us what is the Divine will. In this case there is also a special reason for this peace because of the essential unity of the body of Christ. When we are one with Christ and one with Christians, there is no question as to the power of peace in our life.

V. The Inner Spirit (v. 15)

When the Apostle adds, "and be ye thankful," he means, in Lightfoot's suggestive words, "to crown all, forget

yourselves in thanksgiving towards God." True thankfulness is the very essence of the Christian life, for in proportion as we appreciate what God has done for us and is to us in Christ, we shall realise the peace and power of true living (1 Thess. 5:18).

VI. The Abiding Power (v. 16)

The next exhortation refers to the word of Christ which we are to allow to dwell in our hearts (Psa. 119:11). It is not enough to be taught the truth; we must possess it as a present personal experience. It is to be in us as abiding there, dwelling in us as in a home. "It should not be treated as a stranger or slave, at a distance, but received as an intimate guest." It is to abide in us plentifully in all the variety of its wealth and power. It is also to dwell in us "in all wisdom," so that we may know thereby how to live and how to help others live. In proportion as we meditate on God's Word and fill our minds with its truth, we shall have the consciousness of power and the means of blessing. Everything in the Christian life is in one way or another associated with the Word of God. At this point there is a little difference of punctuation. The A. V., followed by Lightfoot, punctuates with a full stop after the word "wisdom," but it would seem more natural with several great authorities to make a slight change and connect the word with what follows. This is how the phrase will read according to the new suggestion: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another; with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing with grace in your hearts unto the Lord."

VII. The Definite Duty (v. 16)

The work of teaching and warning others is very important and it naturally follows from the possession

of Christ's word in our hearts (1:28). Only as that word is dwelling in us richly can we safely and truly be the means of blessing to others.

VIII. The Joyous Attitude (v. 16)

The reference to psalms and hymns and spiritual songs seems to indicate something of the life of the early Church, though it is not easy to distinguish between these three forms of praise. Perhaps the "psalms" refers to the Psalter, and "hymns" to Christian compositions, while the third word would naturally include the other two, and yet go further in referring to all forms of song, so long as they are spiritual. No mention is made that these songs are to be referred, still less limited, to public services, and perhaps there is the idea of joyous fellowship at family and other social gatherings, suggesting that praise was to be characteristic of the daily life of the believer. It is also encouraging to realise that whatever we can or cannot do with the lips, it is still possible to sing in the heart, for if only the inner life is in tune with God through His grace, our whole being will in one way or another manifest itself to God's praise and glory. There seems no doubt that this singing refers to the soul's personal fellowship with God and expresses the state of the heart when it is alone with Christ. It means that the consciousness of God's grace fills the soul with such joy and peace that the heart cannot but rejoice before God. This is a fine test of our spiritual condition.

IX. The Supreme Principle (v. 17)

Then from the heart the thought extends outward to the entire life and everything is included in the one all-embracing principle of "doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus" and thanking God through Him. Christianity is a religion of principles, not rules, and everything

is to be done to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). This is the mark of the true follower of Christ who performs his duties in union with his Saviour and in the consciousness that his life belongs to the One who died that he might live. It means the joy of conscious salvation and conscious fellowship, and is the dominating principle and adequate inspiration of all true life and service.

In this section we have a wonderful picture of Christian living, and it is very significant that some of the verses are in the Greek aorist tense, which invariably refers to a definite act, while others are in the present tense, which always indicates a continuous action. Thus the former speaks of the Christian position and principle, and the latter of the Christian process and progress; the one speaks of being "in Christ," and the other "for Christ."

1. *The Christian Position.* This is described as "God's elect, holy and beloved." These three descriptions tell of what the Christian is in the sight of God. He is chosen of God, consecrated for God and loved by God, and all these come from his union with Christ.

2. *The Christian Conduct.* The thought of clothing nearly all through this section emphasises the need and duty of a proper outward appearance. As clothes are an indication of personality, so the impression and expression of these graces will show "whose we are and whom we serve."

3. *The Christian Secret.* This is shown to be threefold: the peace of Christ, v. 15; the word of Christ, v. 16; and the name of the Lord Jesus, v. 17.

Thus our union with Christ is not only the basis of our spiritual position, it is the source, secret, strength, and satisfaction of our spiritual state in every detail.

CHAPTER XIX

The Christian Home, 3:18–4:1

THE Christian life is first personal and then social, and the same principles are intended for both spheres. At this point the application of the foregoing principles is made to home life. The Christians were to "show piety at home" (Titus 2:5) and thereby to prove the reality and power of their spiritual life. A man once asked, "Is so-and-so a Christian?", and the reply was given, "I do not know, I have never lived with him." Three instances are used, expressive of the three main social relationships of life.

I. Wives and Husbands (vs. 18, 19)

Wives are exhorted to submission. Bishop Moule renders this by "loyalty" because this suggests better the idea of a wife's attitude, which is religious, and yet not in the strict sense of the term, service. This appeal for submission is in no sense contradictory of the essential oneness of male and female in Christ (Gal. 3:28), because grace never contradicts nature. Nor is there anything incongruous or inappropriate to Christian womanhood, because "order is heaven's first law" in every sphere of life (1 Cor. 11:3). This exhortation is enforced by the wife's relation to Christ. Because she is in Christ she is to love as befits that relationship of union, for those who are one with Him will readily and gladly fulfil His word.

Husbands are exhorted to love their wives. It has often been pointed out that there is no word expressive of the opposite of submission, like "order" or "command." Submission, not commanding, is emphasised. Love includes

everything that a husband should be to a wife, because here, as elsewhere in the New Testament, love is not a mere feeling but a fact, not emotion but devotion, not attitude but action, not sentiment but sacrifice. The addition is made that husbands are not to be "bitter" against their wives, expressing the absence of all selfishness, temper, and lack of true consideration from the life of the Christian husband. Comparison should be made between this and the corresponding but much longer passage in the companion epistle (Eph. 5:22-33), where the husband's attitude to the wife is specially emphasised as illustrated by the relation of Christ to the Church.

II. Children and Parents (vs. 20, 21)

Children are exhorted to obey their parents in all things, and the reason is again the highest possible one, expressive of their relation to Christ, "this is well-pleasing in the Lord." The thought of giving pleasure to Christ is a fine and inspiring reason for children to obey and one that should make its appeal to the experience of the young.

Fathers are not to provoke their children, an exhortation which probably includes all undue hardness, while of course maintaining proper discipline. Children may easily lose heart by overmuch severity, and this condition of soul easily leads to wrong-doing. All who are associated with children know how easy it is to discourage them, and how powerful in their training and development is the element of encouragement.

III. Servants and Masters (3:22-4:1)

It is striking that this subject is dealt with far more fully than the other two. Lightfoot and Rutherford think this is due to the special circumstances of Onesimus being sent back to Colosse to his master. Some writers con-

sider that as the relationship of master and slave was not so natural and essential as the others, it needed a fuller and more urgent treatment. Perhaps both these thoughts may be combined. There is a sevenfold appeal to the slave, which is very significant. (a) He is called upon for obedience (v. 22). (b) This is to be genuine obedience, coming out of an undivided heart (v. 22) and free from all improper obsequiousness (Matt. 6:22). (c) It was also to be a thorough obedience (v. 23) proceeding from the soul and expressive of all the power of the inner being. (d) It was also to be a spiritual obedience (v. 23), as the slave was conscious of the Lord as the One to whom his service was really being rendered. (e) It was also an encouraging obedience (v. 24) since the slave was told that he would be rewarded by Christ who knew what he was doing and why he was doing it. (f) It was an obedience which was really a privilege (v. 24), for in serving his earthly master he was actually serving Christ as well. This would give a special color to the humblest service day by day. (g) And yet it must be a righteous obedience, because if he did wrong there would be judgment, since God is no respecter of persons. While there is no merit attached to our work, there is a blessed and adequate reward of faithfulness.

The master is pretty certainly included in this reminder (v. 25), because it was possible for him to do his slave an injustice, and if this should happen he too would be dealt with impartially by God who is absolutely just. This gives a special point to the exhortation to the masters to render to their slaves what was "just and equal," inasmuch as these masters were themselves the servants of a Master in heaven. It is interesting to notice that while the Apostle does not say a word about emancipation, it was certain to come, as it actually did come, by Christian masters doing that which was "just and equal." With such funda-

mental principles, slavery would be thoroughly and permanently undermined and destroyed.

1. The *reality* of home life is here specially emphasised, and it is impossible to exaggerate the value of a true Christian home. "There's no place like home." It is Christianity, more than any other religion, that has made possible pure, loving and unselfish home life. The requirements are few and simple, as may be seen from this passage. No home needs an elaborate and complicated set of rules to realise its true life. If only parents, children, and servants carry out what is so clearly set forth here, there will be no question about the peace, joy, blessedness and power of homes everywhere.

2. But the most striking feature of all is the way in which everything in the home is *related to God.* Seven times over this thought of everything being done in His sight is presented in this passage. Wives are to submit "in the Lord" (v. 18); children are to obey "in the Lord" (v. 20); servants are to "fear the Lord" (v. 21); they are to work as "unto the Lord" (v. 23); they will receive their reward "from the Lord" (v. 24); they serve "the Lord Christ" (v. 24), and masters are to be true because they, too, have a "Master in heaven" (4:1). Thus salvation, sanctification, sympathy, submission, and service are all associated with Christ.

CHAPTER XX

An Apostle's Advice, 4:2-6

THE Epistle draws to a close and after the doctrinal teaching come some personal counsels, with special reference to practical life.

I. Prayer (v. 2)

The Apostle exhorts to continuance in prayer. The word he uses is singularly interesting and illuminating when looked at in its use in the New Testament. Thus, in writing to Rome St. Paul begs them to "continue instant in prayer" (Rom. 12:12). The earliest believers continued regularly in the Temple (Acts 2:46); Simon "continued with Philip" (Acts 8:13); the little boat was to "wait" on our Lord "continually" (Mark 3:9). These all suggest persistence and perseverance in prayer, what Maclaren helpfully describes as "regular adherence as well as uninterrupted companionship," including "earnestness and continuity." This is no doubt the meaning of what is often described as "the spirit of prayer" for as someone has remarked, "whatever may be the attitude of the body, the soul should always be on its knees."

II. Watchfulness (v. 2)

The connection of this with prayer is significant. It is the word employed by Christ in Gethsemane to the disciples (Matt. 26:38, 40), and implies alertness, avoiding all drowsiness and sleep. We are never told in the New Testament *what* or *whom* to watch, the word, though in the active voice, being invariably found without the customary object. We are not to watch ourselves, which would be depressing; we are not to watch Satan, which

would be distracting; we are not to watch our sins, which would be disheartening, but we are to keep our gaze fixed on Christ, "looking off unto Jesus" (Heb. 12:2, Greek), and as we are occupied with Him we shall be enabled to see all that is necessary for us to see. "In thy light shall we see light."

III. Thanksgiving (v. 2)

Once again this note of thankfulness is struck, and it is impossible to exaggerate its importance, especially as it is found so often in the New Testament (3:15; 1:12; 1 Thess. 5:18; Eph. 5:4, 20). This feature of the Apostle's spiritual life is most impressive and there is no doubt that its absence is invariably a cause of weakness of faith and hope, for thanksgiving will inevitably result in "thanksliving."

IV. Intercession (vs. 3, 4)

The appeal for prayer was intended to include the Apostle as well (Eph. 6:19), and this would prevent their prayers from becoming self-centered. He was an ambassador of the Gospel in bonds (Phil. 1:13) and he desired that God would give him unhindered opportunity to proclaim the Gospel. He wishes every hindrance removed so that to all who came "the mystery of Christ might be made known." He was conscious of a supreme necessity for manifesting this Gospel (1 Cor. 9:16) and he sought their prayers in order that he might be enabled to do it as he was bound to do. There are few ways of usefulness more valuable and powerful than that of intercession, especially for our fellow-workers and for ministers. It is a very familiar incident that on one occasion Spurgeon was asked the secret of his success and he remarked, "My people pray for me." In no mere poetical or theoretical sense, but in blessed practical reality, the words of Tenny-

son are true, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

V. Conduct (v. 5)

Now the counsels turn to the outward life of the Christians, with special reference to those who are not yet believers, and the Apostle urges them to "walk in wisdom" and to "redeem the time." The description of the unconverted as "them that are without" (1 Cor. 5:12) in contrast with them that are within, is at once significant and sad, because the unbeliever is not only outside the Church, but he is without God, without Christ, without real joy, without power, and, of course, without hope (Eph. 2:12). There is scarcely anything more impressive than this simple yet wonderfully significant description, "them that are without." Outside a house is often to be in darkness, in danger, in storm, in loneliness, and when people are outside Christ they are without fellowship, in constant peril, and in the unutterable darkness of sin. This phrase, "them that are without" should often come home to "them that are within," and make its solemn and searching appeal for prayer and effort. "To walk in wisdom" means to live a life of conduct in such a way as to impress and win "them that are without." Some one has said that "the Christian is the world's Bible, and sometimes they will read no other." There is no doubt that Christians are continually being watched by those that are not yet followers of Christ in order to see whether there is any reality is our religion. The late Bishop of Durham makes an impressive point on this passage in his valuable volume, *Colossian Studies.* He tells of one who was "totally sceptical," and while not unwilling to listen to Christian witness, he was stumbled by the listless air of a Christian congregation in Church, and the man asked himself, "Can these Christians possess any secret better than my reason

gives me?" (p. 261). "Redeeming the time" means in the original "buying up the opportunity," which suggests letting no opportunities be lost, using every occasion wisely to impress and if possible lead to Christ "them that are without." As Lightfoot, referring to the corresponding passage in Ephesians (5:16), says, "The prevailing evil of the times makes the opportunities for good more precious."

VI. Speech (v. 4)

Their words, as well as their conduct, need to be true to Christ. Their speech is not merely to be pleasant but marked by Divine grace, and the "salt" means such a spiritual flavour that it will never be flat, but forceful and telling, wholesome, free from all harm, and capable of inspiring others with moral and spiritual blessing (1 Pet. 3:15). When a Christian bears testimony with brightness, and yet without lightness, his words will be a blessing to those around and a testimony to the God of all grace.

As this section is reviewed we see in it something of the completeness of the Christian life. It has its relation to God (v. 2) and its relation to man, in prayer, word, and deed. This is the meaning of the word "consistent," which implies a life that stands firmly and well all around, with no weakness or failure such as the unconverted might use as a reason for continuing to neglect and reject Christianity. A life that is true and strong, blessed and useful in every part, will do more than anything else to glorify God and win others to Him (Matt. 5:16).

This is only possible by the grace of God in answer to prayer and trust. It was an apostle who said, "by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10), and the same grace is available for us if only we are ready to look up to God and yield ourselves to Him in wholehearted surrender and sincere obedience (2 Cor. 9:8).

CHAPTER XXI

An Apostle and His Friends, 4:7-17

THE pictures of St. Paul's friends are among the most helpful parts of his Epistles. Those who have read that delightful book, *The Companions of St. Paul,* by Dean Howson, will know what can be derived from a study of the various references to those who were associated with the Apostle in his life and work. Only brief hints are given, as a rule, but these are sufficient to indicate the characters of the people, and what St. Paul thought of them. Here we have a galaxy of workers which we shall do well to consider one by one.

I. Tychicus (vs. 7, 8)

He is mentioned five times in the New Testament, first in Acts 20:4, 5, then here and in Ephesians, and last of all in Titus 3:12, and 2 Tim. 4:12. In all these we see his close association with the Apostle, and it is no wonder that the Apostle can speak of him as he does in the threefold way (v. 7), of (a) affection, "beloved brother"; (b) approbation, "faithful minister"; and (c) association, "fellow-servant." Nor is it a surprise that Tychicus should have been sent by St. Paul for the twofold purpose of obtaining information about the Colossian Christians, and of encouraging and cheering them in their Christian life. The one thought that seems to stand out more than anything else from Tychicus is that of faithfulness. Probably he was not brilliant or outstanding, but he was dependable, and this above all else was what the Apostle needed under such circumstances. The same thing is true of all our Christian service, for God does not seek for success or marvellous power, but for quiet, humble, genuine faith-

fulness of heart and life. "Good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21, 23), "Be thou faithful unto death" (Rev. 2:10).

II. Onesimus (v. 9)

We know that he was a runaway slave of Philemon and was being sent back to Colosse, and it seems as though before his flight he had not been a Christian, but that in going to Rome he was led to Christ through the Apostle. Now, as he was being sent back to his old home, it was necessary for someone to be ready to give evidence of the change which had taken place. This St. Paul does, both here and in the Epistle to Philemon. Nothing could be finer than the testimony afforded, and nothing could be more delicate than the precise way in which Onesimus is presented to the Christians in Colosse. He is called "the faithful and beloved brother," words that are almost exactly identical with those used of Tychicus (v. 7), and Epaphras (1:7). The former slave in becoming a Christian had become a "faithful and beloved brother." Christianity has a marvellous power to restore and transform lives.

III. Aristarchus (v. 10)

He was a Hebrew Christian (v. 11) of Thessalonica in Macedonia (Acts 19:29) and one of Paul's companions on his journey. He then accompanied St. Paul on his voyage as a prisoner (Acts 27:2), and is here called St. Paul's "fellow-prisoner." This must mean either that he shared the captivity or had been apprehended for some reason unknown to us. In any case, he is a sufferer with the Apostle and reminds us of the way in which God's will may be done. Activity is only one way of serving God; for "they also serve who only stand and wait." It must have been as hard for Aristarchus as we know it

was for St. Paul to be a prisoner, and thereby prevented from doing active work for Christ, but if only we live in the will of God, our circumstances can be made subservient to His purposes. An old woman, full of bustle and activity, was laid aside, and her friends wondered how she could possibly bear the inaction after her constant restless service. When they asked about this, she replied, "When I was able to do it the Lord said, 'Betty, go here,' and 'Betty, go there,' but now He says, 'Betty, lie still and cough.'"

IV. Mark (v. 10)

This is a reference to the well-known author of our second Gospel, the cousin of Barnabas, and the companion of Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey (Acts 13). It is particularly interesting to notice this allusion to Mark, because it implies that the estrangement was at an end. Opinions differ as to which was right, Barnabas in his partiality, or Paul in his severity (Acts 15:37-39). Perhaps we may say that both were right, for it may well have been that St. Paul's strictness made Mark realise what was necessary, while the love of Barnabas gave him another opportunity of recovering himself from his former weakness. It is clear that Mark was a genuine help both at this time and subsequently, to the Apostle (2 Tim. 4:11). It is also thought that the tone of St. Paul's reference to Barnabas after their separation is marked by genuine affection (1 Cor. 9:6; Gal. 2:1, 9).

V. Justus (v. 11)

Nothing more is known of him than is told us here, though it is interesting to realise that one of his names is that of our Lord Himself. He, and the other two, Aristarchus and Mark, were Jewish Christians, and had

been a real comfort to the Apostle Paul. It would seem from this that all the other Jewish Christians in Rome were separated from him and were not a comfort. Perhaps this is what he meant when he referred to his affliction (Phil. 1:15-17). The circumstances in Rome among the Christians at that time must have made St. Paul feel still more grateful for the encouragement and cheer which came from these three brethren who in their fellowship had been a solace to him.

VI. Epaphras (vs. 12, 13)

During the three years of St. Paul's stay at Ephesus (Acts 20:31), Epaphras seems to have been led to Christ, and to have carried the Gospel to Colosse, where the Apostle had never been (Col. 2:1). Then Epaphras came to St. Paul in Rome with news of the Church and was sent back with this Epistle. The description of the man is very striking and will call for more detailed attention in our next chapter, but we may notice now the Apostle's testimony to him (v. 13), that he was continually thinking of and working for the Christians, even though he was far away from them (v. 13). The word rendered "labour" really means "pain" and implies both keen desire and great effort. The cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis were in the neighborhood of Colosse and Epaphras had evidently been the evangelist in all three places.

VII. Luke (v. 14)

This is of course the author of our third Gospel and The Acts. He first appears in St. Paul's company at Troas (Acts 16:10) and went with the Apostle to Jerusalem (Acts 20:5, 6; 21:1, 17), and also to Rome (Acts 27:1). He was with him when this Epistle was written, and it is beautiful to observe the words of the great warrior for Christ just before he was beheaded;

"only Luke is with me" (2 Tim. 4:11). It is usually thought that the way in which Luke is here distinguished from the Jewish Christians implies that he was a Gentile, and, if so, he is the only New Testament writer who was not a Jew. Thus two of the four evangelists, Mark and Luke, are among the friends of St. Paul. Luke is called "the beloved physician," and we can well understand the comfort of his presence and knowledge to the Apostle, especially at this time.

VIII. Demas (v. 14)

It is impressive and perhaps significant that nothing is said about Demas as in the case of the other fellow-workers. Possibly already there was a danger of what afterwards took place, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). The contrast between Mark and Demas is striking; Mark returned but Demas seems not to have done so. The contrast between Luke and Demas, as they are mentioned together here, is equally impressive, the one suggesting faithfulness and loyalty, the other unfaithfulness and weakness.

IX. Nymphas (v. 15)

There are two readings, one referring to a man's name (Nymphas) and the other to a woman's (Nympha). Whichever is correct, the reference is to a Christian home in Laodicea, and the brethren there are greeted with "Nymphas." The reference to a private house as the ordinary place of gathering for the early Christians, is an interesting illustration of the simplicity of the earliest Church fellowship. In Colosse, the Church met in the house of Philip. In Ephesus, in the house of Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor. 16:19), and when these two removed to Rome they did exactly the same there as they had done in Ephesus (Rom. 16:5). All this is at once a testimony

to the value of Christian homes and the blessedness of Christian fellowship, and the more we can have of both of these, the better it will be for the reality and progress of Christian living.

At this point it is interesting to notice that the present Epistle was intended to be read in the Church of Laodicea, while the Epistle sent to that Church was to be read in Colosse. It is usually thought the latter refers to our Epistle to the Ephesians, which was pretty certainly a circular Epistle intended for several Churches. This reciprocal use of the Epistles in various Churches forms the germ of that acceptance and use of writings from Apostolic sources by various Churches which reached its culmination in our New Testament.

X. Archippus (v. 17)

No one knows anything more of Archippus than what is found here, though one scholar suggests the probability of his being a son of Philemon (Philem. 2). Most writers think that the admonition given here implies some laxity of duty, though this is of course altogether uncertain. In any case it is an appeal to watchfulness and thoroughness in the ministry which he had received from the Lord.

XI. Paul (v. 18)

It is impossible to close this account of St. Paul's friends without thinking of the Apostle himself, for his references to others are a genuine reflection of his own heart and life, and of those things which he felt the most essential features of the Christian life. All through the Epistle we find references to him which reveal a good deal of his own life in relation to God (1:3, 24, 25; 2:1, 5; 4:3, 4). Whether, therefore, in preaching or praying, or practice, the Apostle is a wonderful example for us and we shall do well to follow him, even as he followed Christ.

CHAPTER XXII

Secrets of Living, 4:12

IT is at least suggestive, and it may be significant, that there is an almost entire absence of appeal in St. Paul's Epistles to evangelise, only one such exhortation being found (2 Tim. 4:5). But there is a constant emphasis on the Christian life of holiness and the necessity of realising our full privileges in Christ. There may be some connection between the absence of the appeal and the presence of the emphasis, for if the inner life is right, soul-winning and evangelism will be the natural and necessary outcome. Certainly, as water never rises above its level, so our service in its quality, reality, vitality and energy will never be higher than the genuineness of our fellowship with God. It is this that makes the reference to Epaphras so important, for it reveals what was evidently the outstanding feature of his Christian life.

I. The Fact

The greatest service we can render to others is to pray for them. Forbes Robinson, of Cambridge, used to say that instead of calling on a man or inviting a man to call on him, he found it more profitable to spend a half-hour in prayer for the man. Abraham's prayer for Lot, Christ's prayer for Peter, Paul's prayers for the Churches—all show the value and importance of intercession. How this brings blessing is of course a mystery, but it is clear from Scripture that we can help by prayer, and love without prayer lacks its deepest force. Epaphras had the Colossian Christians ever in mind as he went before God in prayer.

II. The Foundation

The reason why he was able to pray was that he was "a servant of Christ Jesus." Christians alone can really pray because prayers are only possible when based on the acceptance of the promises of God. It is one of the proofs of the new life, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11). This is a service that all can render. Epaphras could not write the wonderful Epistles of St. Paul, but he could pray, and this we know he did. Let us therefore be encouraged in this special and blessed work. There are many things outside the power of ordinary Christian people, and great position, wide influence, outstanding ability may be lacking to almost all of us, but the humblest and least significant Christian can pray, and as "prayer moves the Hand that moves the world," perhaps the greatest power we can exert is that which comes through prayer.

III. The Nature

Three things are mentioned in connection with the prayer of Epaphras. It was earnest, "striving" for them. This is the word found in connection with the Apostle's own prayers (1:29; 2:1). It is akin to the word "agony" which is associated with Gethsemane. There is nothing in this of our modern idea of pain or anguish, but there is assuredly in it the idea of the athlete wrestling and putting forth all his power. It suggests at once the *cost* of prayer and also the fact that Satan is continually hindering God's people from praying. Be it ours to put all our effort into prayer and thereby to manifest spiritual earnestness. Epaphras was also persistent in his prayers, *"always"* striving. He was not content with asking once, but bore these Colossian Christians continually before God. Our Lord said that "men ought always to pray and never to

lose heart" (Luke 18:1, Greek). The definiteness of his prayer must also be noticed, "always striving for *you.*" He knew what he wanted and he knew those for whom he was praying, and so he asked with clearness and force. This is the prayer that always prevails.

IV. The Purpose

Three things sum up the desire of Epaphras for his friends in Colosse and they represent some of the essential elements of the Christian character.

1. He prayed that they might be steadfast, "that ye may stand." We need, as doubtless they did, the steadfastness of resistance against error and of persistence in work. Many people are tempted and fall because they are not able to withstand in the evil day, and many others fail to continue in the Christian life because they lack that perseverance which enables them, "having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

2. He also desired them to be ripe and mature in the Christian life, "that ye may stand perfect." The word "perfect" is contrasted with the babe in another of St. Paul's Epistles (1 Cor. 3:1), where the thought is of unripeness and immaturity. There is also the solemn thought of the second childhood of those who had gone back from their Christian position (Heb. 5:12, 13). This may almost be called overripeness. The true Christian will be "perfect" in the sense of spiritually mature, realising the "end" (Greek) or object for which he is a follower of Christ. It will mean clearness of spiritual perception, tenderness of spiritual sympathy, charm of spiritual attractiveness, and fruitfulness of spiritual influence. It is very important to bear in mind that the word "perfect" never means sinlessness in the New Testament.

3. Another element of the Christian life for which he prayed was what may be called assurance, "fully assured

in all the will of God." The thought seems to be identical with, or else akin to certainty, and the word is found in three connections in the New Testament—the fulness or full assurance of faith (Heb. 10:22); the fulness or full assurance of hope (Heb. 6:11); and the fulness or full assurance of understanding (Col. 2:2). It means that the Christian is intended to be *quite sure* of God's will in regard to his acceptance, his fellowship, and his equipment. He knows and is certain of his position in Christ, he knows and rejoices in his communion with Christ, he knows and is certain of his provision from Christ.

As we consider what Epaphras was doing, we see that in many ways intercession is the greatest necessity and the most blessed work we can do. Whether our prayers are for individuals or for communities of Christians, we should "pray, always pray." It is also our bounden duty, for as "priests" unto God we ought to make the fullest possible use of this ministry of intercession.

And if any one should think that this is difficult, the Apostle reminds us of the way in which Epaphras accomplished his work by himself living "in the will of God." For us the Word of God is the expression of His will, and with daily meditation, daily application, daily trust, daily obedience, we shall become mighty in prayer because "mighty in the Scriptures." The Word of God is the fuel of prayer and will prompt, inspire, and encourage us to petition and intercession. In particular, it will reveal to us the wonderful intercession of Christ above (Rom. 8:34) and the equally wonderful intercession of the Holy Spirit within (Rom. 8:26), and because thus linked with the throne through Christ and the Holy Spirit we shall be "bound by gold chains about the feet of God."

CHAPTER XXIII

A Look Back

AFTER going through an Epistle like this and pondering every word and every phrase in its order, it is spiritually helpful to review it as a whole and to think of the great themes that occupied the Apostle's thought. The circumstances of the Colossian Church are of course somewhat different from those of today, and yet the Epistle has so much of permanent truth that even its definite and direct appeals to Colosse may be used by us.

The main theme of the Epistle from beginning to end is the Person and Work of our Lord. Arising out of this it is possible to see what he thinks (a) of the Christian life, whether of the individual or of the community, (b) the Christian service which has to be rendered, and (c) the dangers that beset God's people. It would be helpful to go through this brief Epistle along these four lines. (1) What does it say of Christ? (2) What does it say of the Christian life? (3) What does it say of Christian work? (4) What does it say of Christian perils? Under these main topics, practically all the teaching of the Epistle can be included. Or we may analyse it afresh in this way: (1) The Prayer, 1:9-14; (2) The Person of Christ, 1:15-29; (3) The Power of Christ, 2:1-23; (4) The Practice of the Christian life, 3:1-17; (5) The Proof of the Christian life, 3:18–4:6. Let us see by way of summing up, what the teaching means for us at the present time.

1. Christianity Means Holiness

All through the Epistle this theme is presented in various ways. The Apostle's thanks and prayer (1:3-13)

are concerned with this important truth, while the practical part of the Epistle (3:5–4:6) emphasises the need and duty of holiness in heart and life, individual, home, and society. Nothing is more important or prominent in this Epistle, as indeed all through St. Paul's writings, than the emphasis placed on Christian holiness.

II. Holiness is Based on Redemption

It is impossible to be holy without having our sins forgiven, and this means that only as we are redeemed by grace can we be what God intends us to be. This is another theme of the Epistle which, while emphasised in certain parts (1:20–2:3), is implied or stated from beginning to end. Redemption alone is the fount of holiness.

III. Redemption is Founded on the Deity of Christ

The work of Christ must of necessity spring out of His Person, and only a Divine Person (1:15-19) can do a redemptive work. The thought of Christ being anything less than God would make redemption absolutely impossible. It is here that all modern systems fail which do not emphasise the Godhead of Christ, for without His Deity there can be no salvation.

IV. Christ is Available for All

The Colossian Christians were in serious danger of interposing between themselves and God mediators which could not possibly meet the need, and would in reality tend to shut out God from their lives. The Apostle flings the door wide open and says that "every man" without exception (1:28) can approach God without any human mediation (2:18, 19). This is the glory of Christianity, that it is a religion of direct access to God, for through Christ we have our introduction by one Spirit to the Father (Eph. 2:18).

V. The Characteristic of the Christian Life is Union with Christ

The way in which the Apostle emphasises the Headship of Christ shows what this means (2:10, 19), and the thought of believers being "in Christ" or "in the Lord" that runs from beginning to end is noteworthy because of its clear implication of our spiritual union with Christ. The saints and faithful brethren are "in Christ" (1:2); our faith is in Christ Jesus (1:4); redemption is ours in Christ (1:14); all things hold together in Him (1:17); in Him all fulness dwells (1:19); every man is to be presented mature in Christ (1:28); all Christians are made full in Him (2:10); wives, husbands, children, servants, and masters are all in one way or another appealed to because of their relationship to Christ, because they are "in the Lord" (3:18–4:1); and St. Paul's friends have the same blessed spiritual position (4:7, 12, 17). Thus we see how the believer is united with Christ in His death (2:20) and resurrection (3:1), and is now living above with a life hid with Christ in God (3:1-3).

VI. This is the Adequate Protection Against All Error

The Colossian Church was faced with two great dangers (2:4-23), one doctrinal and the other practical, and the Apostle points out that both perils can be met and more than met by the reality and power of their union with Christ. So is it today, for whatsoever may be the danger of the Christian man or the Christian Church, union and communion with Christ, who is at once Divine and human, redemptive and sanctifying, is the complete protection in the face of every conceivable peril.

VII. Thus Everything Culminates in the Grace of God

The closing prayer "grace be with you" (4:18) is only an echo of what is found all through the Epistle. The Colossian Christians had heard and had known "the grace of God in truth" (1:6) from the very first of their Christian life and this grace had continued with them every step of the way, reminding them of what God was able to be and do as they realised their union with Him. It is our privilege similarly to realise the adequacy, sufficiency, abundance and power of the grace of God in all things in our life, until that day comes when grace will be manifested in glory and we live forever " to the praise of the glory of His grace" (Eph. 1:6).

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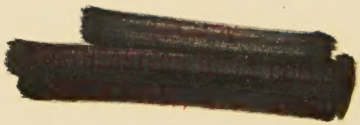

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